

**Interdisciplinary Study on Korean Kirogi Mothers' Adjustment:  
A Practical Theological Framework for Pastoral Care and Counseling**

**A Dissertation  
presented to  
the Faculty of  
Claremont School of Theology**

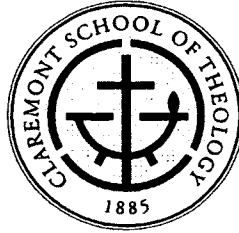
**In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**by  
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May 2013**

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partial fulfillment of the requirements of the

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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## Abstract

### Interdisciplinary Study on Korean Kirogi Mothers' Adjustment: A Practical Theological Framework for Pastoral Care and Counseling

Inhyo Cho

This dissertation is a study of the Korean Kirogi phenomenon, especially of Christian Kirogi mothers' adjustment issues in the United States. The Kirogi phenomenon is a growing issue in Korean immigrant communities and churches in the U.S. Kirogi mothers emigrate from Korea with their children, leaving their husbands behind in Korea, to obtain better educations for their children in English-speaking foreign countries. This is a relatively new and unique social phenomenon in Korea. Thus, very little literature exists in the fields of theology, pastoral theology, feminist pastoral theology, or cognate fields related to Kirogi Christian mothers' experiences.

Using a mutually critical correlational approach to practical theology, this dissertation draws on phenomenological research methods, employing the qualitative data analysis program, NVivo 10, to describe Kirogi mothers' current experiences and meanings. I conducted semi-structured interviews with fourteen Korean Christian Kirogi mothers and investigated how Korean culture influenced these women's decisions to become Kirogi mothers and how they experienced Kirogi life, especially their difficulties in adjusting to a new culture, the prejudices they encountered, and their experiences of parenting as single mothers.

The Kirogi mothers' experiences were examined from an interdisciplinary perspective, taking into consideration the uniqueness of each woman's experience, to equip churches and caregivers to hear and understand the concerns of Kirogi mothers, especially their adjustment issues. This method provided insights into the real-life



experiences of Kirogi mothers in interaction with the theoretical resources of psychology, theology, and cultural contextual studies. The findings of this study are used to create a practical theological framework that will enable pastoral caregivers to understand the meanings of Kirogi mothers' experiences and to contribute to the development of effective care that nurtures and empowers them.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### The Problem

This dissertation is a study of the Korean Kirogi family phenomenon, especially of Christian Kirogi mothers' adjustment issues in the United States. The term "kirogi" means "wild geese" in Korean. Geese are known for devotion to their goslings, migrating long distances to provide them food in a warmer climate.<sup>1</sup> The Kirogi family phenomenon is a growing issue in Korean immigrant society and churches in the U.S. Kirogi mothers leave Korea with their children, leaving their husbands in Korea, to obtain a better education for their children in English-speaking foreign countries. This is a relatively new social phenomenon in Korea.<sup>2</sup> This transmigrant Kirogi phenomenon, an outcome of globalization experienced in Korea, started in the early 1990s. The number of Kirogi families has been increasing rapidly year by year.<sup>3</sup>

This phenomenon is due to the educational crisis in Korea. The term "crisis" has been used since the 1990s due to dissatisfaction with the Korean educational system that overemphasizes examination success.<sup>4</sup> In this context, English became an important asset of social mobility in the globalized era. This educational crisis became a serious social issue since education is a very important factor for Korean people and their children's

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<sup>1</sup> Hakyoon Lee, "'I am a Kirogi Mother': Education Exodus and Life Transformation Among Korean Transnational Women," *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education* 9 (2010): 250.

<sup>2</sup> Ji-Sook Yeom, "Composing Life as a Korean Goose Mother: A Narrative Inquiry into Sue's Experiences," *International Journal of Early Childhood Education* 14, no. 2 (2008): 267.

<sup>3</sup> Kyung Ju Ahn, "South Korean Transnational Mothers: Familism, Cultural Criticism and Education Project" (Ph.D. diss., Syracuse University, 2009), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Young-ee Cho, "The Diaspora of Korean Children: The Cross Cultural Study of the Educational Crisis in Contemporary South Korea" (Ph.D. diss., University of Montana, 2007), 29.

success in Korean society.<sup>5</sup> This phenomenon is deeply embedded in cultural, historical, and social backgrounds. Despite these factors, however, Young-ee Cho maintains that the decision to become a Kirogi family is made willingly, by an internal factor, not external factors such as economic and political hardship.<sup>6</sup> The decision to Kirogi living arrangement is made by not only mothers but also fathers. Yean-ju Lee and Hagen Koo found that the fathers are active participants in the family splitting and maintain a strong supportive role for the children in their research.<sup>7</sup> Once decided, parents are willing to maintain their family's separation often for many years until their children enter universities. Their choice of being Kirogi mothers is based on their cultural values of self-sacrifice and putting their needs second to that of other family members<sup>8</sup> and their emphasis on English as an important part of education.

Kirogi mothers face many challenges adjusting to a new culture and adapting to changing roles with their increased responsibility as a single parent. Kirogi mothers become head of the family and have to make decisions regarding family life previously made by their husbands in Korea. They typically experience uncertainty and unfamiliarity, which affects their parenting. Therefore, Kirogi mothers seem likely to experience emotional difficulties and social isolation in adapting to a new culture and in the process of acculturation. According to Siyon Rhee, single parents need support

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<sup>5</sup> Young-ee Cho, 7.

<sup>6</sup> Young-ee Cho, 54.

<sup>7</sup> Yean-ju Lee and Hagen Koo, "Wild Geese Fathers and a Globalised Family Strategy for Education in Korea," *International Development Planning Review* 28, no 4, (2006): 533.

<sup>8</sup> Chiyoung Cha, "Health and Health Promotion among Korean Goose Mothers" (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 2010), 2.



systems to alleviate some of their high levels of stress.<sup>9</sup> Wen H. Kuo and Yung-Mei Tsai discovered that new immigrants' psychological distress can be reduced by success in establishing social networks in the new country.<sup>10</sup> In the case of Korean immigrants, friends, relatives, and church members were found to be important social networks in Canada.<sup>11</sup>

However, the Korean immigrant community does not seem to welcome Kirogi mothers; rather, it stigmatizes them. Throughout Korean history, women without a male household head have been assumed to have loose morals.<sup>12</sup> According to Jinhee Chung, "while the South Korean society itself has had vast changes related to gender role attitudes during the past decade, Korean immigrants' communities are more reluctant to change their patriarchal views."<sup>13</sup> Thus, many Kirogi mothers are vulnerable to being stigmatized, so they do not actively engage in a Korean immigrant community or a Korean immigrant church and do not seek support when it is needed. Pyong Gap Min asserts that Confucianism has left a legacy of values, traditions, and beliefs that are deeply embedded in the Korean culture, and Korean immigrant churches are reluctant to change their patriarchal views.<sup>14</sup> In relation to this traditional family system, Korean

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<sup>9</sup> Siyon Rhee, "Effective social work practice with Korean immigrant families," *Journal of Multicultural Social Work*, 4, no. 1 (1996): 49.

<sup>10</sup> Wen H. Kuo and Yung-Mei Tsai, "Social Networking, Hardiness and Immigrant's Mental Health," *Journal of Health and Social Behaviour* 27 (1984): 147.

<sup>11</sup> Jinhee Chung, "An Exploration of Korean Immigrant Women's Leisure in Spiritual Settings" (M.A. thesis., University of Waterloo, 2008), 15.

<sup>12</sup> Chiyoung Cha, 4.

<sup>13</sup> Jinhee Chung, 20.

<sup>14</sup> Pyong Gap Min, "Changes in Korean Immigrants' Gender Role and Social Status, and Their Marital Conflicts," *Sociological Forum* 16 no. 2 (2001): 309.

immigrant women experience more constraints and conflicts in the process of acculturation.<sup>15</sup>

Kyung Ju Ahn found that the Korean church can be an essential place for Kirogi mothers, providing social activities, psychological relief, and spiritual empowerment, not only in the big cities but also in the small cities.<sup>16</sup> However, the focus of Korean immigrant churches on families and or married couples has also led to the blaming of Kirogi mothers for abandoning their families, especially their husbands, for their children.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, Christian Kirogi mothers who attend Korean immigrant churches may feel alienated, distressed, and guilty, and this might result in their losing their faith and spirituality or ceasing to attend church due to their feelings of marginality based on the prejudices of church members.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the need for effective care is rising accordingly.

I am a Kirogi mother, too. I came to the United States with my two children eight years ago to study and left my husband in Korea. I experienced disconnection from the external world and felt isolated in the beginning. As a mother of two teenagers and a full time Ph.D. student, I needed to be a supermom to do all of my tasks by myself. Since I was reluctant to ask people, including church members, for help with my practical and emotional needs, it made me more exhausted. Although an increasing number of Kirogi mothers migrate to English-speaking countries from Korea, not many persons in the U.S. know the meaning of this migrant family phenomenon. Therefore, one purpose of my

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<sup>15</sup> Jinhee Chung, 20.

<sup>16</sup> Kyung Ju Ahn, 108.

<sup>17</sup> Kyung Ju Ahn, 106.

<sup>18</sup> Kyung Ju Ahn, 106.

work is to offer insight into the meaning of the Kirogi phenomenon in the United States and how to deal with it, especially in church settings.

While Korean immigrant churches are beginning to recognize the necessity of responding to this phenomenon, by and large they seem ignorant of how to care for Kirogi mothers or are inadequately prepared, although there is a rising need for effective pastoral care and counseling amongst the growing number of Kirogi mothers. The hard thing is that both Kirogi mothers and churches do not seem to want to address or deal with this issue explicitly because of the stigma or prejudices. Only limited theory and investigative research on this issue are available. Therefore, as a student of practical theology, my desire is to develop a much needed theological framework and strategies for adequate pastoral care and counseling tailored to Kirogi mothers, so that through this academic pursuit, they will be supported and empowered.

### Thesis

This dissertation is a work of practical theology that investigates the theological meanings of Kirogi mothers' experiences in relation to social scientific and cultural studies and gains insights to construct an adequate model of pastoral care and counseling in the church to respond to Kirogi mothers' adjustment needs. Therefore, my thesis is that the capacity of pastors, congregations, and pastoral counselors can be strengthened in providing effective ministry for Christian Kirogi mothers' adjustment through investigating the prejudices in relation to Korean cultural, religious, and social values that would affect Korean immigrant churches' attitudes and Kirogi mothers' decision-making. This dissertation is an exploratory study to discover what is going on regarding the

experience of Christian Kirogi mothers through empirical research that yields data from interviews with such mothers.

Using a phenomenological qualitative research approach, I investigated how Korean culture influences women's choice to become Kirogi mothers and how they experience Kirogi life, especially their difficulties in adjusting in the new culture, the prejudices they encounter, and parenting as single mothers. Along with this, this study also examined how Kirogi mothers' specific beliefs lead them to silence and invisibility, and how Kirogi mothers can be empowered to get involved in the church. Furthermore, I examined how Korean Kirogi mothers' cultural values interact with Christian beliefs in their transition, and how they see their marginality in American society and in the Korean immigrant church. Then, Kirogi mothers' experience in the Korean immigrant church was examined from an interdisciplinary perspective, especially through the women's perspective, taking into consideration the uniqueness of each woman's experience, to equip the church and caregivers to hear and understand the concerns of Kirogi mothers' adjustment issues. It is to formulate an understanding of both theories of and practices with Kirogi mothers from the theoretical perspectives of several disciplines.

### Method

In this study, two research methods were used: hermeneutical and empirical research. A practical theological research framework is employed with an interpretive phenomenological research method. The use of this qualitative method allows one to search for a deeper meaning and a more thorough understanding of Korean Christian Kirogi mothers' experiences. Data were collected with thirteen Korean Christian Kirogi mothers through individual in-depth interviews. Data were then analyzed using the

NVivo 10 data analysis program. This method provides insights into the real-life experiences of Kirogi mothers in interaction with the theoretical resources of psychology, theology, and cultural context. The real-life experiences were interpreted theologically by using a mutually critical correlational method of practical theology. I hope this study will contribute to the fields of practical theology and pastoral care and counseling. The methods of the study are discussed thoroughly in Chapter 3.

### Contributions and Related Literature

Since the Kirogi phenomenon is a very recent one, not much is known about the phenomena or about Korean Christian Kirogi mothers' particular struggles. Although there have been various attempts at exploring the Kirogi phenomenon, previous studies have focused on educational practices in relation to globalization, the marital separation between Kirogi fathers and Kirogi mothers, and the Kirogi phenomenon as an extended form of studying abroad. I identified eighteen previous studies: I identified eighteen previous studies: none focused on gender roles or on Kirogi mothers' life stories, in spite of the importance of mothers' roles in this phenomenon. Moreover, studies discussing the effectiveness of theories and practices for the pastoral care and counseling of Kirogi mothers are rare in the literature. I found only one piece of literature that matches this theme.

Research on Kirogi mothers in Korean immigrant churches is significantly lacking. The Korean immigrant church has been ignorant of how to deal with the issue of Kirogi mothers and no scholarly research or writing exists regarding this subject. As indicated above, very little literature exists in the fields of theology, pastoral theology, feminist pastoral theology, or cognate fields related to Kirogi Christian mothers'

experiences. Therefore, the results of this study are expected to help pastoral caregivers understand the meaning of Kirogi mothers' experiences and to contribute to the development of effective care. I hope this study will encourage caregivers to take seriously the difficulties associated with being Kirogi mothers and give voice to them.

Given that this dissertation will examine ministry for Kirogi mothers from an interdisciplinary perspective, this research aims to contribute to the literature on Kirogi mothers in practical theology, pastoral care and counseling, and other disciplines, such as religion, psychology, anthropology, and education. This study is influenced by literature in the discipline of practical theology. In particular, this study approaches the task of practical theology in a manner similar to the work of many authors who adopt the mutual critical correlational method, which will be reviewed more in detail later.

### Audience

My primary audience includes pastors and church layleaders in their ministries with Kirogi mothers in the Korean immigrant church. This study will offer critical insights into Kirogi mothers' experiences from cultural, psychological, and theological perspectives for Korean Christian immigrant pastors and church leaders. This dissertation also seeks to assist pastoral counselors who encounter Kirogi mothers as clients in their counseling practices. This dissertation will provide an in-depth understanding of Kirogi mothers to whom pastoral counselors can offer an enriched therapeutic experience. Finally, since this dissertation aims to provide pastoral theological understandings for the Kirogi mothers, it will be helpful for pastoral theologians and educators in Korea and in the U.S. as a resource for pastoral theological reflection and teaching.

### Definitions of Terms

*Kirogi Mothers*: They are Korean mothers who are part of a group of international women named after geese.<sup>19</sup> The Korean name for a wild goose is “kirogi.” A pair of carved wooden geese is a central symbol in traditional Korean weddings and represents the new husband and wife. The goose metaphor is used by Koreans to characterize a good couple relationship as well as love for their offspring.<sup>20</sup> New couples are expected to keep the same partner for life and to take care of their children, just as wild geese travel long distances to bring back food for their young.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, Kirogi mothers go with their children for a better education to English-speaking foreign countries while their husbands earn money in Korea. Kirogi mothers are distinguished from single mothers who are divorced or separated. Around early 2000s, “Kirogi” began to be used by Korean media to name Kirogi families are separated by an ocean as children live abroad with their mothers.<sup>22</sup>

*Practical Theology and Pastoral Theology*: They are used as interchangeable terms in some contexts.<sup>23</sup> Practical theology is an overarching term for pastoral theology and other disciplines such as homiletics and religious education. The term pastoral theology was first utilized in the mid-eighteenth century among Protestants and meant the pastoral care functions of ministry.<sup>24</sup> It was not until 1920s and 1930s that it began to be regarded as discipline in which psychodynamic psychologies were integrated with religious experiences. In the 1960s and 1970s, the basic tool for models of care was

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<sup>19</sup> Chiyoung Cha, 1.

<sup>20</sup> Taeik Kim, “Kirogi Daddy [기러기 아빠],” *Chosun Ilbo*, 28 November 2004.

<sup>21</sup> Young-ee Cho, 52.

<sup>22</sup> Young-ee Cho, 53.

<sup>23</sup> Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, “Feminist Theory in Pastoral Theology,” in *Feminist and Womanist Pastoral Theology*, ed. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore & Brita L. Gill-Austern, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 90-91.

<sup>24</sup> Doehring, “A Method Feminist Pastoral Theology,” in Miller-McLemore and Gill-Austern, 99.

therapeutic techniques.<sup>25</sup> Valerie M. DeMarinis presents that pastoral psychology consists of pastoral care, pastoral counseling, and pastoral psychotherapy.<sup>26</sup>

*Pastoral Care and Counseling:* Pastoral care does not focus on the treatment of specific dysfunction but the care of the whole person in relationship.<sup>27</sup> Pastoral counseling is mostly a short-term focus on specific issues and is needed when pastoral care reaches its limits. Pastoral counseling includes pastoral psychotherapy, which involves more “intensive work with a person for whom there are issues or problems that cannot be resolved easily.”<sup>28</sup> Pastoral counseling is distinguished from Christian counseling in that pastoral counseling is accountable primarily for a community of faith.<sup>29</sup>

*Christian:* The term *Christian*, as used in relation to Kirogi mothers, refers to those who attend a Korean Protestant immigrant church, regardless of denomination, in Southern California.

*Research Partner:* It is used to name the interviewees rather than “subjects,” “participants,” and “respondents.” Then, research partners in my study will be collaborators and co-creators.

### Scope and Limitations

This research is focused on Kirogi mothers’ adjustment. First, for the scope of this project, I focused only on Kirogi mothers, not Kirogi children or Kirogi fathers.

Secondly, among many dimensions, such as issues of parenting, couple relationships, and

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<sup>25</sup> Doebling, *A Method Feminist Pastoral Theology*, 99.

<sup>26</sup> Valerie M. DeMarinis, *Critical Caring: A Feminist Model for Pastoral Psychology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 6-13.

<sup>27</sup> John Patton, *Pastoral Care in Context: An Introduction to Pastoral Care* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 216.

<sup>28</sup> DeMarinis, 7.

<sup>29</sup> Patton, *Pastoral Care in Context*, 216.



the health of Kirogi mothers, I chose to work with their adjustment issues from a practical theological perspective. The adjustment experiences of Christian Kirogi mothers were examined theologically, psychologically, and culturally. Thirdly, although Kirogi mothers go to other geographical locations, including other nations, I considered only Kirogi mothers' experiences in the greater Los Angeles area in the United States. Fourthly, this dissertation was written from the perspective of Protestant Christianity and focused on the care of Protestant Christian Kirogi mothers. This choice was made because of my own location in Protestant Christianity. Finally, in this project, I chose Kirogi mothers who are not seriously ill physically or psychologically in order to exclude the possibility that their illnesses affect their adjustment issues.

#### Outline of Chapters

In this first chapter, the problem of caring for Kirogi mothers in the immigrant Korean church is presented. Also, a statement of thesis, method, definition of terms, and the scope and limitations of this project are presented. An outline of the rest of the chapters is also included. At the end of this chapter, I reviewed literature on Kirogi mothers' adjustment along with the pastoral theological literature on their experiences, and I included literature on Korean American or Korean immigrant women's experiences and pastoral theological works regarding them. In Chapter 2, a review of the current literature on the subject is presented. This literature review includes an understanding of the Korean social, historical, and cultural backgrounds of the Kirogi phenomenon. Further, a review on Korean immigrant churches is included. In Chapter 3, a discussion of the dissertation's empirical research and hermeneutical method is presented, including the use of in-depth interviews and the data collection and analysis procedures. A review

of relational cultural theory and feminist practical theology are also included as interpretive frameworks. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the qualitative research. It offers a summary of the results and findings as a thick description of the current experience of Kirogi mothers in the Korean immigrant church. In Chapter 5, the findings are further hermeneutically analyzed from the perspectives of feminist practical theological frameworks and relational cultural theory. A practical theological framework, strategies for pastoral care and counseling, and limitations of the study are offered.

### Literature Review on Kirogi Mothers

In this section, the literature on Korean Kirogi mothers' experiences is reviewed along with pastoral theological responses to their experiences. However, since the Kirogi phenomenon is a recent occurrence in Korea, there is a scarcity of literature specifically on this topic. Therefore, since there is not a sufficient amount of literature about Kirogi mothers' experiences from a pastoral theological perspective, literature from other fields, such as education and anthropology, will be presented. I will reference literature on Korean American and Korean immigrant women's experiences and relevant pastoral theologies, because reviewing the experiences and culturally imposed roles of Korean women and Korean American women will be helpful in understanding the phenomena of Kirogi mothers' choice of a transnational living arrangement and their issues of adjustment in the United States.

This section is organized into three subsections: (1) traditional Korean women's roles and status in the family and society; (2) Korean immigrant women's adjustment; and (3) pastoral theological care and counseling for Korean women and Korean American women. The literature review in this section will provide a basis for

understanding Korean Christian Kirogi mothers' adjustment as it is embedded in cultural traditions and acculturation to life in the United States.

### Traditional Korean Women's Roles and Status

The cultural beliefs that have contributed to the formation of Korean Kirogi families and the experiences of Kirogi mothers are explored in this subsection. To understand Korean Kirogi mothers' lives, it is essential to explore the cultural background that influences their value systems, family systems, and views of self. This will give clues to their choice of the Kirogi living arrangement and their experiences in the U.S.

The structure and functions of families in Korea have been changing recently.<sup>30</sup> As Korea has experienced rapid economic and social changes due to modernization in recent decades, it has adopted not only Western science and technology, but also Western culture, which has produced a transformation of Korean culture. Hence, traditional values are often challenged, especially by younger generations. However, the Confucian influence on Korean families is still pervasive.<sup>31</sup>

In traditional Confucian Korean society, women were the most abused victims of Confucianism.<sup>32</sup> They had multiple roles simultaneously: wife, daughter-in-law, and mother. Their ultimate goal was to become a good wife and serve their families, while being dependent on and submissive to their husbands. Thus, Korean women were reduced to an inferior role. They were even considered deceitful creatures who had the

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<sup>30</sup> Insook Han Park and Lee-Jay Cho, "Confucianism and the Korean Family," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 26, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 117-134.

<sup>31</sup> Insook Han Park and Jay-Cho Lee, 132.

<sup>32</sup> Chul Woo Son, "The Motives of Self-Sacrifice in Korean American Culture, Family, and Marriage: From Filial Piety to Familial Integrity" (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2010), 34.

potential to cause trouble and bring bad luck.<sup>33</sup> Although the importance of sons is not as great as it used to be, Koreans still tend to prefer sons over daughters. Married women feel relief, pride, and joy when they give birth to a son, because they believe that their primary duty to their parents-in-law has been fulfilled.<sup>34</sup>

If women's roles were not carried out, they were shamed, received punishment, and were rejected from society.<sup>35</sup> Likewise, the norms of femininity in the patriarchal system often made women feel ashamed when they deviated from it.<sup>36</sup> Accordingly, women needed to be constantly attentive to what their husbands were thinking and concerned about in an effort to preserve these interpersonal relationships.<sup>37</sup> This vigilance came at the cost of suppressing their emotions, personalities, needs, and ambitions.

Chiyoung Cha and Eunjung Kim illustrate how Korean women's self is compromised by the needs of family.<sup>38</sup> In the Confucian family system, each member has a distinctive role designed to help the family fulfill its collective goal. Hence, the self is neglected in favor of the whole family. Korean husbands support the family financially through working in the public domain, while Korean wives are responsible for the domestic domain. Thus, Cha and Kim assert that the center of the family is the mother-child relationship, and Korean women identify themselves as only mothers, rather than as women with their own needs.<sup>39</sup> For them, the responsibility of Korean women in the domestic domain is the reason that Korean men are alienated from their families.

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<sup>33</sup> Martina Deuchler et al. *Virtues in Conflict: Tradition and the Korean Woman Today*, ed. Sandra Mattielli (Seoul: Samhwa Publishing, 1977), 5-6.

<sup>34</sup> Insook Han Park and Jay-Cho Lee, 132.

<sup>35</sup> Chul Woo Son, 35.

<sup>36</sup> Insook Lee, 171.

<sup>37</sup> Chul Woo Son, 35.

<sup>38</sup> Chiyoung Cha and Eunjung Kim, "Assessing the Role of Culture in Korean Goose Mothers' Lives," *Journal of Transcultural Nursing* 20, no. 10 (Jan 2013): 1-8

<sup>39</sup> Chiyoung Cha and Eunjung Kim, 3.

Women's roles in Confucianism (372~ 1910) have been transferred to modern Korean society, and modern and traditional roles of mothers are intermingled for Korean mothers today.<sup>40</sup> In contemporary Korea, women have more opportunities for education, careers, and public activities and have come to achieve more freedom and equality than in traditional Korea. However, they face more conflicts between their self-images and socially defined roles and between their dreams and social obstacles. According to Kelly Chong, contemporary Korean women have a stereotypical image that is twofold and contradictory; they are perceived as both submissive and strong and subordinate and tough.<sup>41</sup>

Jaeyeon Chung also contends that despite enhanced living conditions, contemporary Korean women have experienced more confusion in identity, self-images, and roles than women before them.<sup>42</sup> She claims that they are deprived of the chance to develop healthy self-esteem through mutual relationships with others and participation in the social domain. Their confusion thwarts their ability to find meaning in their lives, and they sacrifice their needs for the sake of others' in order to feel valuable. Chung states that Korean women's self-denial and manipulative control of others, especially of their husbands and children, can be attributed to this unconscious search for meaning and self-worth through self-sacrifice. Consequently, they come to feel empty and to have low self-esteem.

The life goal of contemporary Korean mothers is their children's success, so they

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<sup>40</sup> Marian Lief Palley, "Women's Status in South Korea: Tradition and Change," *Asian Survey* 30, no. 12 (1990): 1136-53.

<sup>41</sup> Kelly H. Chong, *Deliverance and Submission: Evangelical Women and the Negotiation of Patriarchy in South Korea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008), 142.

<sup>42</sup> Jaeyeon Chung, "Our Stories, Our Lives: Korean Women, Self Esteem and Practical Theology" (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 2008), 52.

tend to see their children as extensions of themselves.<sup>43</sup> For them, their own careers, achievements, and marital ties are less important than their children's educations. Hence, what their children accomplish becomes their own accomplishment, and their children provide them with opportunities to realize their own unfulfilled dreams. Korean mothers persistently support their children, enabling them to succeed in life.<sup>44</sup> Further, due to societal pressures to accomplish women's roles, Korean mothers have tried hard to be supermoms. For them, being a mother is a fulltime job that requires much energy and devotion. Cho calls this fulltime job, "education manager." Many other researchers concur that this job is more meaningful to Korean mothers than outside jobs, because their children's success determines their future.<sup>45</sup>

Accordingly, Korean mothers as education managers have contributed to the education fever in Korean society. The expectations of women have become greater as modernism has improved women's position in society. This is because the system of patriarchy is now operating in more hidden ways and has even become stronger.

#### Korean Immigrant Women's Adjustment

In this section, I review literature on Korean American women's roles and status, which are also rooted in traditional Confucian values, and the challenges they face as they enter the new culture of the U.S. In this study, the terms, "Korean American women" and "Korean immigrant women" are used interchangeably. It is assumed that their experiences are similar to Kirogi mothers', since Kirogi mothers also come to the U.S.

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<sup>43</sup> Young-ee Cho, 151.

<sup>44</sup> Uichol Kim, Young-Shin Park, Young-Eun Kwon, and Jaisun Koo. "Values of Children, Parent Child Relationship, and Social Change in Korea: Indigenous, Cultural, and Psychological Analysis," *Applied Psychology: An International Review* 54, no. 3 (2005): 338-54.

<sup>45</sup> Young-ee Cho, 160.

from Korea and encounter the challenges of being part of two cultures. However, there exist differences between them, and these will be presented later in this subsection.

Korean immigrant women living in the U.S. are influenced much more by traditional Korean culture than by Western culture.<sup>46</sup> Ai Ra Kim describes their general image as “docile, subservient, and passive.”<sup>47</sup> Moreover, Korean American women have faced double marginalization and double subordination throughout the history of immigration in the U.S., because they have to follow the Korean values systems while enduring racial and sexual discrimination and political and economic inequality in the U.S.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, it can be said that they experience multiple oppressions. As a result, living in the interlocking structures of oppression, these women often tend to be invisible and silent in public.

Jisun Kwak contends that Korean American women’s loss of voice causes a loss of sense of self and autonomy.<sup>49</sup> One of the contributing factors to losing their voice is Korean men’s dual attitude toward Korean women: Korean men expect Korean women to work a lot at home, but it is not acceptable for them to raise their voice in the working world.<sup>50</sup> Korean American women’s authentic self becomes silenced because of the traditional cultural emphasis on harmonious relationships. Kwak says, “In collectivistic Asian culture, relationships and interdependence are crucial to the existence of self in the

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<sup>46</sup> Jisun Kwak, “Self and Culture: What it Means to be a Woman in the Korean Family” (Ph.D. diss., Drew University, 2011), 7.

<sup>47</sup> Ai Ra Kim, *Women Struggling for a New Life: The Role of Religion in the Cultural Passage from Korea to America* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), xi.

<sup>48</sup> Bocheol Chang, “Resisting and Transforming: Pastoral Theology and Care of Korean Military Wives” (Ph. D. diss., University of Denver, 2008), 47-50.

<sup>49</sup> Jisun Kwak, 12.

<sup>50</sup> Jisun Kwak, 19.

U.S.”<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, Michele Jhun Lee states that Korean American women’s level of acculturation also influences self-silencing.<sup>52</sup> In the process of acculturation, Korean women learn helplessness, which prevents them from achieving personal growth and developing self-esteem.

Heejung Kwon elaborates how Korean American women have been often characterized by silence, invisibility, and negative stereotypes. They show subordination in terms of gender inequality and marginalization, and they exhibit submissive attitudes toward dominant systems.<sup>53</sup> Kwon presents several forms of ambivalent subjectivity found in Korean women’s everyday experience, including inconsistent attitudes regarding patriarchal structures by performing different gender roles in the family and in the business world.<sup>54</sup> Kwon also discovers that Korean American women tend to avoid engaging in open critique, although they criticize gender inequality and other forms of women’s passivity privately in their faith communities.<sup>55</sup> According to Jung Ha Kim,

Women learn how to take advantage of the traditionally feminine attitude of silence and submission, as the result of which they gain some intended and unintended rewards.<sup>56</sup>

Exploring the complex dynamics of Korean American women’s subordination and resistance to patriarchy, Kim redefines them from the perspective of liberative religious education. Kwon considers the motivation behind women’s submission as the crucial

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<sup>51</sup> Jisun Kwak, 24.

<sup>52</sup> Michele Jhun Lee, “Self-Silencing, Cultural Factors, and Depression among Korean American Women” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 2009). 74-76.

<sup>53</sup> Heejung Kwon, “Toward a Theological Anthropology of Resistance: Korean American Women’s Ambivalent Subjectivity, ‘Third Space’ and Religious Education” (Ph. D. diss., Emory University, 2012), 10.

<sup>54</sup> Heejung Kwon, 30-43.

<sup>55</sup> Heejung Kwon, 45.

<sup>56</sup> Jung Ha Kim, *Bridge-Makers and Cross-Bearers: Korean-American Women and the Church* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1997), 110.



expression of resistance rather than merely submissive acts. Hence, Kim points out the paradoxical relationship between the women's submission and resistance and their ambivalent subjectivity.<sup>57</sup>

So far, I have reviewed literature on Korean American women's experiences. However, Korean Kirogi mothers do not exactly fit the categories of traditional Korean women or Korean American or immigrant women, because their stay in the U.S. is usually temporary for the sake of their children's education and they are living separate from their husbands. Moreover, they do not participate in economic work. Likewise, although the experiences of Korean American women and Korean Kirogi mothers appear to be similar due to having the same cultural background and living in two different cultures, their stories differ from each other. From this point on, to explore Kirogi mothers' lives, nontheological-based literature on Kirogi mothers' experiences is reviewed.

Chiyoung Cha and Eunjung Kim assess the role of culture in Korean Kirogi mothers' lives and report the difficulties they experience during the adjustment process, such as role alteration, depression, lack of social support, and intergenerational conflicts.<sup>58</sup> Cha and Kim illustrate that Korean parents regard their children's success as an achievement of the whole family. They call this phenomenon, "family-oriented collectivism."<sup>59</sup> For them, the Korean Kirogi phenomenon occurs because of this family-oriented collectivism. Another contributing factor to the Kirogi phenomenon is the Korean family system in terms of being a role-based family system and a mother-child-

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<sup>57</sup> Heejung Kwon, 11.

<sup>58</sup> Cha and Kim, 1-8.

<sup>59</sup> Cha and Kim, 3.

centered family system. In a role-based family system, each member of the family has a distinct role designed to help fulfill a collective goal. According to Cha and Kim, Kirogi families can maintain their ties even if they separate if it is for the sake of fulfilling their collective family goal.<sup>60</sup>

However, Cha and Kim continue on to say that Kirogi mothers struggle with extended parenting roles without their husbands in the U.S.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, Kirogi mothers are criticized, both in Korea and in Korean communities in the new country, because they are not guided by a male head in the family. According to them, “Although the law officially designating the oldest male in the family as household head was abolished in 2008, this custom still remain in Korea.”<sup>62</sup> As a result of their extended parenting role, Kirogi mothers experience vulnerability, which causes them to hide their status as transnational mothers. Other than vulnerability, Cha and Kim speculate that Kirogi mothers experience lack of social support and intergenerational conflicts.

Kyung Ju Ahn explored how the traditional Korean values of Korean transnational mothers are changed during the transnational living arrangement, and she uncovered new findings. According to her, the process of adjustment leads to the deconstruction of Korean values:

The transnational Korean family has a chance to break up the rigid boundaries of family, including the concept of home, family identity and the priority of family interests. Spatial elasticity also might indicate the dilution of Korean familism. Therefore, the transnational family’s everyday practices hasten changes and mutations in Korean familism.<sup>63</sup>

Therefore, Korean Kirogi mothers are criticized as disrupting the traditional family

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<sup>60</sup> Cha and Kim, 3.

<sup>61</sup> Cha and Kim, 4.

<sup>62</sup> Cha and Kim, 4.

<sup>63</sup> Kyung Ju Ahn, 173.

culture and creating “instrumental familism” or “crippled familism,” in spite of following Korean familism.<sup>64</sup> The reason for the criticism is due to the image of the abandoned father or sacrificial father in contrast to the image of the Kirogi mother, who seems to live luxuriously.<sup>65</sup>

Ahn also found that Korean Kirogi mothers are additionally criticized due to the reversal of gender roles. Without husbands, Kirogi mothers have to play the role of head of family during the Kirogi living arrangement. However, Ahn suggests that, rather than blaming Kirogi mothers, more investigation into the origins of their choice of transnational migration, which is rooted in traditional Korean familism, is essential.<sup>66</sup>

#### Pastoral Theological Care and Counseling for Korean Women

This subsection reviews pastoral theological responses regarding Korean American women's and Korean Kirogi mothers' adjustment and care. It includes analyses of Korean women's lives and Korean American women's lives in relation to Korean culture, psychology, theology, and anthropology. The subsection concludes by presenting the work of Suk Yeon Lee, who has studied Korean Kirogi mothers from a Korean feminist pastoral theological perspective.

In her article on pastoral care of Korean American women, Angella M. Pak Son attempts to investigate the discrepancy between an ideal notion of mothering and Korean American women's real experiences of motherhood. She presents the factors contributing to Korean American women's predicament, such as Korean women's self-sacrifice, acculturation, and gender role changes, along with the dynamics of racism and sexism

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<sup>64</sup> Kyung Ju Ahn, 168

<sup>65</sup> Kyung Ju Ahn, 169.

<sup>66</sup> Kyung Ju Ahn, 170.

they face in the United States.<sup>67</sup> Among these factors, she focuses on sacrificial mothering, which is influenced by a patriarchal system. Son believes that a subordinate role and inferior status contribute to an inadequate sense of self in Korean American women. For her, both sacrificial and neglectful mothering are used by Korean American women to deal with their own low self-esteem.<sup>68</sup>

In addition, Son insists that rigid mother role, which places sole emphasis on the education of children, causes damage to women's identity.<sup>69</sup> Rigid mother role usually come to engage in the task of mothering in a manner that manages their own insecure sense of self; they keep themselves at the center of the universe in a way that they never had the chance to be previously.<sup>70</sup> Korean American women's sense of inadequacy as mothers is generated when they cannot assist their children due to lack of language proficiency, knowledge about the U.S. educational system, and cultural familiarity. This can lead to extreme anxiety, frustration, and helplessness.<sup>71</sup> As a result, these mothers need to depend on others, including their husbands and children. The reversal of roles between mothers and children compromises mothers' authority in raising their children.<sup>72</sup>

Son observes that Korean American women experience marital conflict due to their economic participation.<sup>73</sup> Husbands' attempts to claim their traditional status becomes more difficult in the face of their wives' increased power derived from

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<sup>67</sup> Angella M. Pak Son, "Pastoral Care of Korean American Women: The Degeneration of Mothering into the Management of an Inadequate Sense of Self," in Stevenson-Moessner and Snorton, 57-58.

<sup>68</sup> Pak Son, 59.

<sup>69</sup> Pak Son, 64.

<sup>70</sup> Pak Son, 69.

<sup>71</sup> Pak Son, 64-66.

<sup>72</sup> Andrew Sung Park, "The Formation of Multicultural Religious Identity within Persons in Korean-American Experiences," *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 13, no. 2 (fall 2003): 36.

<sup>73</sup> Pak Son, 64-66.

economic participation in the U.S. Consequently, Korean American women are physically overworked and psychologically stressed, feeling doubly burdened.<sup>74</sup> In addition to marital conflict and a loss of a sense of the mother as the educator of her children, Korean American women face the realities of sexism and racism in the U.S. and experience dehumanization.<sup>75</sup> Son points out that Korean American women experience “racial prejudice in the external community that treats them as ignorant, inferior, or imperfect human beings.”<sup>76</sup>

Son examines the theological dimensions of Korean women’s sacrifice and offers pastoral strategies to address this phenomenon. Her pastoral strategies focus on building strong selves rather than warning against excessive self-sacrifice.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, the church’s theological position needs to balance between the necessity of sacrifice and the importance of justice.<sup>78</sup> Son suggests that the issue is not a social or psychological problem but a need to consider theological dimensions carefully.<sup>79</sup> For her, Korean American women’s painful experiences afford God-given opportunities to reshape their patterns of relationships by drawing on Sang Hyun Lee’s theology of “called to be pilgrims,”<sup>80</sup> which posits the meaning of marginalization as a sacred calling from God.<sup>81</sup> In conclusion, Son offers several pastoral theological strategies for Korean American

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<sup>74</sup> Pak Son, 64-66.

<sup>75</sup> Sung Sil Lee Sohng, “A Critical Feminist Inquiry in a Multicultural Context,” in *Korean American Women: From Tradition to Modern Feminism*, ed. Young I. Song and Ailee Moon, (Westport: Praeger, 1998), 11-21.

<sup>76</sup> Pak Son, 67.

<sup>77</sup> Pak Son, 59.

<sup>78</sup> Pak Son, 71.

<sup>79</sup> Pak Son, 70.

<sup>80</sup> Sang Hyun Lee, “Called to be Pilgrims: Toward a Theology within the Korean Immigrant Context,” in *The Korean Immigrant in America*, ed. Byoung-suh Kim and Sang Hyun Lee (New Jersey: Association of Korean Christian Scholars in North America, 1980), 38.

<sup>81</sup> Pak Son, 72.

mothers: (1) pastors need to understand Korean American women's dynamics of self-sacrifice, mutual love, and adequate sense of self; (2) pastors need to address problems regarding Korean women's rigid roles by changing their own leadership style and pastoral image; (3) churches need to develop various programs to promote Korean Americans' development of a cohesive self; and (4) churches need to stop inconsistently dividing spirituality and social actors.<sup>82</sup>

Jaeyeon Chung, in her dissertation, argues that self-esteem is one of the most urgent issues facing Korean women, and low or false self-esteem is the leading factor in their struggles. To empower Korean women, she formulates a new approach, a "relational-transformative approach," and proposes images of care – "healing, companioning, empowering, and transformative reconciliation." For her, this approach suggests "not only [an] individual pastoral caregiver but also a caring community to be an empathic healer, mentoring companion, empowering advocate, and participants in the process of transformative reconciliation."<sup>83</sup>

K. Samuel Lee elaborates how to resolve the tension between Confucian hierarchical influences and the more individualistic and egalitarian influences of North American culture in Korean American families.<sup>84</sup> He examines the effect of multicultural dynamics on the concept of biblical love, construed as agape and mutuality, and proposes a new model to solve Korean Americans' predicament living in a bicultural context. Lee states that while North Americans have more emphasis on mutuality in familial relations,

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<sup>82</sup> Pak Son, 74.

<sup>83</sup> Jaeyeon Chung, 52.

<sup>84</sup> K. Samuel Lee, "Navigating between Cultures: The Bicultural Family's Lived Realities," in *Mutuality Matters: Family, Faith, and Just Love*, ed. Herbert Anderson, Edward Foley, Bonnie Miller-McLemore, and Robert Schreiter (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 107-109.

Koreans focus more on the sacrificial love of family members. He points out the contradiction between hierarchical Korean family relationships and mutual family relationships in America. This contradiction occurs because Korean families make either-or choices between dimensions of two cultures. He finds that Korean American families “try to operate with one set of assumptions in one context and another set of assumptions in another context.”<sup>85</sup>

In response to this contradiction, Lee proposes a “both-and” model that strengthens bicultural families by using both cultures as sources.<sup>86</sup> He asserts that we should not treat one culture as superior to another culture but appreciate the different aspects of familial love within the respective cultures. Such appreciation would promote a “both-and” choice. According to Lee, putting too much emphasis on mutuality alone also ignores the multivalent complexity of human relationships. Using yin-yang philosophy, which presents a complementary dualism, Lee demonstrates how traditional Confucian culture and Western culture can complement each other for healthy familial relationships for Korean American families. In conclusion, he articulates that a purpose of pastoral theological work is to show God’s complicated design embedded in the human lived experience and to help engage multiculturalism faithfully.<sup>87</sup>

Jisun Kwak suggests a new way of understanding the relationship between men and women through the Chinese philosophy of the *I Ching*, so Korean men and women can reach wholeness.<sup>88</sup> She observes that yin and yang are one, but two different aspects of the one, and that “each individual is both yin and yang, or female or male, at the same

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<sup>85</sup> K. Samuel Lee, 107-109.

<sup>86</sup> K. Samuel Lee, 113-117.

<sup>87</sup> K. Samuel Lee, 113-117.

<sup>88</sup> Jisun Kwak, 170.

time.”<sup>89</sup> For her, they completely complement each other. In this sense, Kwak contends that liberation must happen mutually with the change of men’s minds, since yang cannot shape a whole person alone. Then Korean men and women can recover human authenticity and both can experience healing of their wounded han.<sup>90</sup>

Insook Lee reformulates the concept of aggression for Korean American women using feminist theological perspectives.<sup>91</sup> She illustrates that Korean American women have experienced sudden cultural changes, from a Confucian communal culture to a post-communal, democratic, and individualistic culture. Thus, Korean American women are challenged because the new culture emphasizes an assertive expression of individual thoughts and needs, while the traditional Korean culture requires quiet, passive, and humble characteristics.<sup>92</sup> Due to the contrasting values of the two cultures, Korean American women struggle psychologically as they deal with their crisis on an unconscious level, seeking their inner strengths. For Lee, women’s aggression is an inner resource in an immigrant context, a resource that has been systematically suppressed by Confucian culture.<sup>93</sup> She notes that that repression of aggression causes a variety of problems, because Korean women believe that they can acquire self-fulfillment and happiness by limiting their personal and instinctual needs and desires.<sup>94</sup>

However, Lee has discovered that suddenly being exposed to the American culture, Korean American women discover new parts of themselves, such as human aggression. When they encounter a new part of themselves, Korean American women

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<sup>89</sup> Jisun Kwak, 174-176.

<sup>90</sup> Jisun Kwak, 176-180

<sup>91</sup> Insook Lee, “Aggression in Korean American Women: Cultural Adaptation and Conceptual Reformulation,” in Stevenson-Moessner and Teresa, 159-172.

<sup>92</sup> Insook Lee, 160-161.

<sup>93</sup> Insook Lee, 160-161.

<sup>94</sup> Insook Lee, 163-164.



experience anxiety and fear.<sup>95</sup> The Korean Christian church has not encouraged Korean American women to express their nondestructive and positive aggression, rather, it has suppressed it.<sup>96</sup> Therefore, Lee suggests that pastoral caregivers and counselors need to understand Korean American women's Confucian cultural impositions on them and to inform them that women's aggression and assertiveness can be used for accomplishing God's will and plan.<sup>97</sup> For Lee, this practice would help Korean women immigrants adapt successfully into the American mainstream culture.

Kwon asserts that in Korean immigrant churches, Korean American women experience both victimization and resistance. According to her, they use their faith practices for both survival and resistance, while their submission is supported by their faith.<sup>98</sup> For Chong, Korean Christian American women's submission and sacrifice is actually practiced to gain a sense of spiritual authority over their husbands.<sup>99</sup> Chong also reveals that these women's submission is a long-term strategy to effect change by inspiring gratitude and admiration. As a result, Korean American women tend to show indirect, subtle, and passive resistance in order to deal with power relations.<sup>100</sup> Some of them even choose silence as a way of surviving and resisting the patriarchal system in their everyday lives.<sup>101</sup> Jung Ha Kim notes, "Women learn how to take advantage of the traditionally feminine attitude of silence and submission, as the result of which they gain some intended and unintended rewards."<sup>102</sup> Likewise, Kwon brings a flexible approach to

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<sup>95</sup> Insook Lee, 164.

<sup>96</sup> Insook Lee, 169.

<sup>97</sup> Insook Lee, 172.

<sup>98</sup> Heejung Kwon, 59.

<sup>99</sup> Kelly H. Chong, 160-161.

<sup>100</sup> Heejung Kwon, 68.

<sup>101</sup> Heejung Kwon, 99.

<sup>102</sup> Jung Ha Kim, 110.

a theological anthropology of women's resistance to empower Korean American women.

Angella Son offers a new image of pastoral care, "agents of joy," to provide a more effective approach in pastoral care that replaces the current culture of narcissism. For her, a lack of ability to find joy hinders the development of a self that allows us to love others and ourselves.<sup>103</sup> Her image is based on the mutual aspect of relationality, Barth's theology, and Kohut's theory of the cohesive self. For mutual relationships, openness, reciprocity, and mutual influence are required.<sup>104</sup> Against the Christian belief that sacrifice is the pinnacle of Christian life, she suggests self-assertiveness and admiration for others.<sup>105</sup>

Son does not regard the image of agents of joy as hierarchical but as expressing the mutuality involved in a helping relationship between a caregiver and care receiver. According to her,

As Barth delineated the mutuality in being in encounter, agents of joy seek mutuality in seeing, speaking and hearing, and rendering help. They are open to others and expect openness from others; they pursue and expect reciprocity from themselves and others; and they regard highly the freedom in summoning or requesting help from one another.<sup>106</sup>

She also emphasizes the role of Christian communities as healing places in which mutual confession, mutual deepening of hope, and sharing of weaknesses occur.<sup>107</sup>

Sophia Park observes that many Asian immigrants experience dislocation and struggle with identity, while at the same time, they engage others and experience

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<sup>103</sup> Angella Son, "Agents of Joy as a New Image of Pastoral Care," *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 18, no. 1 (summer 2008): 61.

<sup>104</sup> Angella Son, 62-63.

<sup>105</sup> Angella Son, 74.

<sup>106</sup> Angella Son, 77-78.

<sup>107</sup> Angella Son, 78.

empowerment through membership in borderland communities.<sup>108</sup> For her, dislocation refers to marginal status, and those dislocated are voiceless, invisible, and powerless. The borderland is called an in-between space or a third space in which people experience hybridized identities toward transformation and new life. Park emphasizes the importance of identity, which can be shaped by differentiating the self from others through creating boundaries. According to her,

The concept of self is also shaped by the perception of others. However, for the sociopolitically oppressed, the position of the self is often inverted; “the other” becomes the self or the subject.”<sup>109</sup>

“Self” is a very important concept for understanding the relationality of Asian American women. The “other” helps them to differentiate themselves from the dominant system. Park argues that in the borderland, serving each other in friendships based on equality and mutuality empowers members.<sup>110</sup> She examines how to build an ideal community, the ideal of the borderland community, using the Johannine narrative. Dislocated people empowered by relationships can enter into the new borderland community that Jesus created at the foot of the cross.<sup>111</sup>

In her article, “Pastoral Care with Korean Goose Moms,” Suk Yeon Lee introduces the stories of three Korean Kirogi mothers, analyzes them from the women’s perspectives, and engages in a pastoral theological exploration of their lives in the U.S.<sup>112</sup> She addresses the ironic fact that, despite their tremendous sacrifices, Kirogi mothers feel guilty because they cannot totally devote themselves to their children. Hence, regarding

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<sup>108</sup> Sophia Park, “The Galilean Jesus: Creating a Borderland at the Foot of the Cross,” *Theological Studies* 70 (2009): 419-420.

<sup>109</sup> Sophia Park, 423.

<sup>110</sup> Sophia Park, 428.

<sup>111</sup> Sophia Park, 436.

<sup>112</sup> Suk Yeon Lee, 173.

Korean Kirogi mothers' sacrifices for their children, Lee strives to empower Korean women, offering them a balanced view of self-sacrifice. Drawing upon Miller-McLemore's work, she argues that sacrificial love should not be exploitative, forced, or demanded, but chosen and motivated by genuine love.<sup>113</sup> For her, sacrificial love benefits a person by enriching her life.

Suk Yeon Lee argues that the way of perceiving self-sacrifice is different between Western and Korean societies.<sup>114</sup> For her, while Western society seeks liberation from forced self-sacrifice, Korean society looks for self-sacrifice for the benefit of children. Lee says that both cultures are pursuing a healthy balance between sacrificial love and self-fulfillment. Through her interviews, she found that Korean Kirogi mothers' sacrificial love actually gives them an opportunity to find a way to self-fulfillment or to discover a new self-identity. Therefore, she named it "beneficial sacrifice," instead of polarizing sacrifice and self-fulfillment.<sup>115</sup> Beneficial sacrifice not only leads to self-fulfillment but also to the benefit of deeper relationships with their husbands based on compassion and to the experience of self-confidence that comes from learning independent living skills. Therefore, Suk Yeon Lee suggests that Kirogi mothers discern their choices in light of the benefits for themselves as well as their children. Without such discernment, they can be victims, and this will eventually destroy their families.<sup>116</sup> In addition, Lee found that Korean Kirogi mothers left Korea due to the burdens of taking care of their extended families.<sup>117</sup> That is why many Korean Kirogi mothers do not want

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<sup>113</sup> Suk Yeon Lee, 178.

<sup>114</sup> Suk Yeon Lee, 179.

<sup>115</sup> Suk Yeon Lee, 179.

<sup>116</sup> Suk Yeon Lee, 179.

<sup>117</sup> Suk Yeon Lee, 180.

to go back to Korea after meeting their goals for their children's educations and experiencing freedom.<sup>118</sup>

On the other hand, Suk Yeon Lee examines how justice is conducted as a family value in Korean society.<sup>119</sup> She believes that family is not only a source of love but also of justice. She contends that Western family theories would not be beneficial to Korean families, because, drawing on the works of Paul Kleingeld and Joel Anderson, they have a notion that love and justice are opposing commitments. For her, if the sacrifice for the family is voluntarily and freely made, justice is realized. This is different from the sacrifice made due to commitments based on gender-biased socialization. She cautions Korean Kirogi mothers to consider whether their sacrifices are the result of the application of justice within the family or if any double standards exist. Drawing upon Miller-McLemore, she argues that it is important to know when one's sacrifice is from true love or not, and it should be asked if one's love conforms to the standards of a justice-oriented family system. For Lee, Kirogi mothers fairly share suffering with their family members, unlike in the traditional family dynamics which are based on gender inequality.

Suk Yeon Lee suggests Korean Kirogi families learn to be more sensitive to justice within the family.<sup>120</sup> In relation to justice, she finds it interesting that Korean women's repressed self-fulfillment influenced their choice of becoming Kirogi mothers and gave them an opportunity to shape a new identity. Their decision is the beginning of escaping from the traditional relational self in Korean society. She observes that some

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<sup>118</sup> Suk Yeon Lee, 182.

<sup>119</sup> Suk Yeon Lee, 183-186.

<sup>120</sup> Suk Yeon Lee, 186-189.

Kirogi mothers seek an authentic self and develop strong autonomy through new experiences in the U.S. and at the same time try hard to perform the traditional woman's role as a mother and wife. Therefore, she suggests that pastoral care should help Kirogi mothers keep the balance between harmony in the family and promoting self-fulfillment for each family member. In relation to faith, many Kirogi mothers put their faith in God during the time they spend in Kirogi living. For Lee, trusting God is the way of gaining hope, balance, and empowerment and helps Kirogi mothers overcome identity conflicts.<sup>121</sup>

In helping Korean families to find balance between justice and love and between self-fulfillment and sacrifice in family life, Suk Yeon Lee develops a new framework for family values for Korean families. She suggests "a philosophical principle that can conceptualize the justice-oriented family in an Asian context."<sup>122</sup> It is the Chinese concept of *Sansheng*, which "refers to the creation cycle, which is a mutual life-giving spiritual force between five elements."<sup>123</sup> Based on this Chinese philosophy, Lee says,

Instead of viewing the family system as a network of rigid hierarchical relationships, each member should make room for each other so they can develop respect for one another's particularity.<sup>124</sup>

Finally, she recommends that Korean Kirogi mothers use their time in the U.S. as a chance to maximize their best interests and make the most of their time together and their time of separation as well. For this, Kirogi mothers must be "wise enough to maintain a sense of justice within their loving family relationships."<sup>125</sup> To do this requires

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<sup>121</sup> Suk Yeon Lee, 189.

<sup>122</sup> Suk Yeon Lee, 191.

<sup>123</sup> Suk Yeon Lee, 192.

<sup>124</sup> Suk Yeon Lee, 193.

<sup>125</sup> Suk Yeon Lee, 194.

compassion and adaptability and the sharing of their experiences with many other women freely.

In this literature review, the cultural beliefs that have contributed to the formation of Korean Kirogi families and the life experiences of Kirogi mothers have been explored. The traditional structure and functions of Korean families have contributed to the formation of Kirogi families. Although women's status has improved, Korean mothers are now more burdened with the additional role of functioning as educational managers for their children. The Korean Kirogi phenomenon has occurred so that families can achieve their life goals of their children's success. In the Confucian family system, each member has a distinctive role to serve in the fulfillment of the family's collective goal. In particular, Korean Kirogi mothers tend to sacrifice themselves and neglect themselves in favor of the whole family. They think they should be supermoms and perform well in their newly socially constructed roles as well as their traditional roles. These high expectations negatively affect their self-esteem, self-achievement, and meaning-making.

Furthermore, like Korean immigrant women, Kirogi mothers face more challenges in the U.S. than they did in Korea, such as stigma, marginalization, and lack of social support from the Korean community and Korean immigrant churches. They experience multiple oppressions as Kirogi mothers and usually become silent and invisible. Thus, they experience depression, vulnerability, loneliness, and shame during their time living as Kirogi mothers.

Kirogi mothers' sacrificial mothering is attributed to the Korean patriarchal system, and their inferior status contributes to their inadequate sense of self and the nature of their self identities. However, Sukyeon Lee has found that Korean women's

repressed self-fulfillment influenced their choice of becoming Kirogi mothers, and their experiences as Kirogi mothers gave them opportunities to shape new identities. The decision to become a Kirogi mother is the beginning of escape from the traditional Korean relational self.

Many Korean theologians suggest the enhancement of the mutual aspect of relationality to resolve Korean women's predicament. To recover mutuality in relationship, Insook Lee focuses on women's aggression, and Son emphasizes joy. However, K. Samuel Lee cautions against placing the sole emphasis on mutuality over sacrificial love and proposes a "both-and" model that strengthens bicultural families through using both cultures as sources, instead of just one. Suk Yeon Lee proposes a balanced view of self-sacrifice. She does not consider sacrificial love as harmful but rather as providing an opportunity for self-fulfillment to Kirogi mothers when it is voluntarily and freely made. For her, family is not only a source of love but also of justice, and when sacrifices are freely and consciously made, justice can be realized.

The literature review suggests that "these" are important aspects to consider in thinking about Korean immigrant women's life in the U.S. It seems Korean/Korean American authors react to the seemingly unbalanced representation of "American women's issues" as presented by American feminists. Korean American authors seem to strive to strike the balance without having to abandon/put down their own Korean cultural heritage. Based on this literature review, this study will focus on Korean Kirogi mothers' issues, such as self-sacrifice, self-silencing, and acculturation. Using the lenses of feminist pastoral theologies and Relational-Cultural Theory, I will engage relevant literature and the qualitative research data I collect in dialogue in order to develop a



practical theological framework and strategies for pastoral care and counseling with Korean Christian Kirogi mothers.

## CHAPTER 2

### KOREAN CULTURAL CONTEXTS OF KIROGI MOTHERS

The Korean Kirogi phenomenon has occurred because of parents wanting to obtain a better education for their children, since a high quality education becomes an effective means of upward social movement.<sup>126</sup> This extraordinarily strong elite-centered trend and emphasis on global education is deeply embedded in cultural, historical, and socioeconomic factors. Therefore, in this chapter, the literature on the Kirogi phenomenon and its social, historical, and cultural background is reviewed in order to better understand why Kirogi families are split between two countries and marital life is sacrificed for the sake of children's education abroad. In addition, this chapter will conclude with an examination of the roles Korean immigrant churches in the U.S. play in Korean Christian Kirogi mothers' lives.

#### Social Background

In recent decades, Korea has achieved noticeable economic development and educational success. A study of Korea's socioeconomic background reveals how competition and success became two concepts representing modern Korean educational culture.<sup>127</sup> In this section, the socioeconomic circumstances under which the Korean Kirogi phenomenon has emerged are explored.

#### Modernization and Social Change

There has been a great amount of social change in Korea during the past fifty years. In 1965, President Park Chung-hee initiated economic, social, and cultural reforms

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<sup>126</sup> Tae-Sik Kim, "Globalization, New Technologies, and Intercultural Flexibility: Communication and Culture of Korean Adolescents in the United States" (Ph.D. diss., University of Oklahoma, 2012), 37-38.

<sup>127</sup> Tae-Sik Kim, 32.

to address poverty, illiteracy, and underdevelopment in Korea.<sup>128</sup> As a result of his efforts toward modernization, urbanization, and industrialization, the nuclear family replaced the traditional extended family. In this process, the mother's role has expanded to include being a financial manager and an educational manager, while the father is still the head of the household. During the modernization period, Koreans' "education fever" was produced, and the number of private educational institutions escalated along with it.<sup>129</sup> The term, "education fever" (*Kyoyukyeol*), is commonly used in Korean newspapers, on television, and in daily conversations. In the Korean language, "fever" literally means "strong wind, presenting intense desire."<sup>130</sup>

To reduce this unusual educational zeal, considering the extremely high costs for education, the Korean government proclaimed the equalization policy, which included eliminating high school entrance exams in the 1970s.<sup>131</sup> The new policy expanded government bureaucracy to have control over all schools. However, it was ineffective because the government did not consider the cultural and social demands within Korea and the political and economic changes in the globalized world.<sup>132</sup> After Korea joined the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in the 1990s, the Korean government announced the globalization policy. This liberal policy toward globalization served as a challenge to the former equalization policy and led to a new

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<sup>128</sup> Uichol Kim, Young-Shin Park, Young-Eun Kwon, and Jaisun Koo, 341.

<sup>129</sup> Kayoun Chung, "Korean English Fever in the U.S.: Temporary Migrant Parents' Evolving Beliefs about Normal Parenting Practices and Children's Natural Language Learning" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2002), 13-14.

<sup>130</sup> Kayoun Chung, 13-14.

<sup>131</sup> Young-ee Cho, 66.

<sup>132</sup> Young-ee Cho, 84.

educational aim of developing global elites who can be competitive in the globalized market economy.<sup>133</sup>

The government added English as a formal subject to the elementary curriculum, creating an increased emphasis on English education and English communication skills in Korea.<sup>134</sup> After the announcement of the government's plan, parents came to have a great eagerness for increasing their children's English abilities and began teaching their children English before they entered elementary school.<sup>135</sup> Korean mothers cannot ignore the reality that the earlier children learn English, the better they speak it. Their enthusiasm resulted in a fast-growing market for private after-school English classes for children.<sup>136</sup> According to So Jin Park and Nancy Abelman,

The size of the English education market in South Korea, for example, is estimated at over 4 trillion won per year (about \$3,333 million) and the expenditures on English study abroad adds an additional trillion won (about \$833 million). Furthermore, by 1997 already 70% of children in Seoul were participating in the English education market.<sup>137</sup>

English has come to play a key role in the education industry in Korea. Consequently, socio-economic resources and the new English educational policy have fostered educational inequality in Korea.<sup>138</sup> In other words, parents who can afford it can provide their children with an extensive English education and thus the opportunity to enter the

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<sup>133</sup> Hyunjung Shin, "Gireogi Gajok": Transnationalism and Language Learning" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 2010), 66

<sup>134</sup> Boonsoon Byun, "South Korean High School Parachute Kids in Southern California: Academic, Psychological Adjustment, and Identity Formation" (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 2010), 15-16.

<sup>135</sup> Boonsoon Byun, 16.

<sup>136</sup> Young-ee Cho, 171.

<sup>137</sup> So Jin Park and Nancy Abelman, "Class and Cosmopolitan Striving: Mother's Management of English Education in Korea," *Anthropological Quarterly* 77 (2004): 646.

<sup>138</sup> Boonsoon Byun, 18.

colleges of their choice.<sup>139</sup>

Likewise, economic competition and a demand for more formal education emerged due to globalization. Korean students have experienced increased pressure to be prepared for the college entrance examinations required in Korea, so increasingly, they have sought out additional instruction from private educational institutions after school.<sup>140</sup> They study hard until midnight, leaving no time for other activities. As a result of the huge demand for their services, these private educational institutions have made huge profits. At the same time, it has increased not only Korean parents' financial burdens, but also their emotional, psychological, and physical problems. Further, the early English education boom has increased the numbers of students of all ages who engage in early study abroad, especially English study abroad.<sup>141</sup>

Considering the expenses for an English education, Korean parents have become motivated to engage in temporary migration, because it offers better opportunities for their children's English learning while costing them the same amount as other options.<sup>142</sup> Accordingly, Korean parents have begun sending their children or accompanying them to English-speaking countries. Korean mothers' sacrifice for their children's educations is for the purpose of escalating their global power and social mobility, even at the cost of family separation.<sup>143</sup> For them, English fluency is regarded as a means to success and wealth in Korea. According to Kayoun Chung,

Because the English fluency is seen as prerequisite for global citizenship and future economic success, an increasing number of Korean parents seek

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<sup>139</sup> Boonsoon Byun, 18.

<sup>140</sup> Young-ee Cho, 83.

<sup>141</sup> Park & Abelman, 649.

<sup>142</sup> Boonsoon Byun, 16.

<sup>143</sup> Park & Abelman, 646.

opportunities to move temporarily to English-speaking countries in order to further their children's English education. Because speaking English with an American accent is viewed as ideal for global citizenship, the United States has become the preferred destination for this temporary migration.<sup>144</sup>

The phenomenon of temporary migration for educational purposes is a strategy for social mobility that is associated with changing global economic conditions.<sup>145</sup> In response to the current political-economic situation, a new middle class that seeks to move socially upward has emerged. Thus, the globalized education industry has affected the Korean educational system in such a way that Korean parents have come to pursue international educations for their children in order to increase their English fluency.<sup>146</sup> Many scholars call this an obsessive passion for education.<sup>147</sup> According to Seth, this abnormal education fever is a combination of the traditional obsession with education with the modern democratic ideal of equality.<sup>148</sup>

#### Transnational Education Fever: The Emergence of the Transnational Family

The government's efforts to support English education in various ways have not satisfied people's desires to improve their English skills.<sup>149</sup> Accordingly, a large number of South Korean children have been sent to study abroad since the 1990s. The reasons for the increase in studying abroad are dissatisfaction with the Korean public education system and the high costs of a private education. A 2001 survey by the Korean Educational Development Institute revealed that 36.4% of parents were dissatisfied with

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<sup>144</sup> Kayoun Chung, 1.

<sup>145</sup> Hyunjung Shin, 84.

<sup>146</sup> Hyunjung Shin, 11.

<sup>147</sup> Young-ee Cho, 67.

<sup>148</sup> Young-ee Cho, 65; Kayoun Chung, 2

<sup>149</sup> Kayoun Chung, 11.

the Korean educational system.<sup>150</sup> Their dissatisfaction has affected the educational systems, politics, economics, society, and culture of Korea. In particular, it has influenced the change from a patriarchal family-centered social system to separated families and marital discord and from the Confucian ideal of the traditional Korean family to a Western concept of family.<sup>151</sup>

Transnational education fever and the Kirogi phenomenon began at the end of 1999 due to the abolishment of a law prohibiting pre-college students from studying abroad.<sup>152</sup> As a result of the removal of this restriction, Korean parents began taking their children abroad temporarily for the purpose of learning English. The Korean middle class was affluent enough to have two households in two countries because of the economic boom in Korea in the early 1990s. Kirogi families separate for a better education at the cost of family dissolution. This new type of transnational family refers to families whose main members reside in more than two nations. Parreñas notes that in this age of globalization, migrants no longer dwell in an enclosed space but interconnect their daily lives constantly across national borders.<sup>153</sup> Transnational families move back and forth between home and host countries, maintaining their family form. They are referred to as *Kirogi* or *Kirogi Gajok* (Kirogi families) in Korean. Korean Kirogi families represent a special form of transnational family.<sup>154</sup> Although they are separated, they maintain close

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<sup>150</sup> Korean Educational Development Institute, *Korean Education and Young Students Studying Abroad: The First KEDI Educational Policy Forum* (Seoul: Korean Educational Development Institute, 2001).

<sup>151</sup> Norimitsu Onishi, "For English Studies, Koreans Say Goodbye to Dad." *The New York Times*, June 2008. A1.

<sup>152</sup> Gil-won Song, "Nalja Kirogi ('Fly, Wild Geese')"  
*Wolgan Chosun* ("Monthly Chosun") 16 May 2006. 17 May 2006.

<sup>153</sup> Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration, and Domestic Work* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 80.

<sup>154</sup> Yean-Ju Lee and Hagen Koo, 533.

contacts and communication as a functional unit.<sup>155</sup> It is a new phenomenon that has never happened in the past and has become a social issue. Hakyoon Lee states,

Despite recent media reports on the negative consequences of Kirogi families, such as the increasing divorce rate, kirogi father suicide rate, adulterous relationships, and kirogi families' difficulty returning to Korean society, the desire to be kirogi remains very strong.<sup>156</sup>

Although the number of Kirogi families is not known, the increase may be estimated by counting the number of pre-college students going abroad. It has been reported that "approximately 10,000 Korean students left Korea to study in 2004 alone, while those leaving with their mothers were 30,000."<sup>157</sup> According to the Korean Educational Developmental Institute (2009),

The number of elementary school children who left Korea for educational purposes increased 53-fold between 1995 and 2008, from 235 to 12,531 (0.34% of Korean elementary school students). During this period, the number of middle school and high school students who migrated for education also increased seven times, from 2,024 to 14,818 (middle school, 0.44%; high school students, 0.31%). Seventy percent of these migrated to the United States (14,006 children) and Canada (5,453 children). About half of the children who migrated were from Seoul, the capital city of Korea, and the areas nearby.<sup>158</sup>

The destinations of these educational migrants are English-speaking countries, primarily the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.<sup>159</sup>

Likewise, Korean Kirogi family is a unique phenomenon. Kirogi parents are usually educated and middle-class people in their thirties or forties, and their children are elementary or middle school students.<sup>160</sup> This phenomenon similarly occurs in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, and it is called the "flexible family," the "transnational family,"

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<sup>155</sup> Yean-Ju Lee and Hagen Koo, 551.

<sup>156</sup> Hakyoon Lee, 251.

<sup>157</sup> Onishi, *New York Times*, A1.

<sup>158</sup> Korean Educational Developmental Institute. *2008 Education Statistic Analysis Source Book*, (Seoul: 2009) Cited in Cha and Kim, *Assessing*, 1.

<sup>159</sup> Hyunjung Shin, 8.

<sup>160</sup> Hyunjung Shin, 8-9.



and the “astronaut family.” However, the Kirogi phenomenon has been more directly caused by economic motivations, while the phenomenon in other nations tends to be driven by anxiety over cloudy political situations.<sup>161</sup> According to Young-ee Cho, the choice is made by Koreans, not because of an external factor such as economic and political hardship, but because of an internal factor, the willingness to support one’s children’s education.<sup>162</sup>

In sum, modernization, globalization, and the educational culture of Korea have influenced the unique trend of young children migrating to English-speaking countries for educational purposes. This trend is motivated by a desire to find a beneficial place to upgrade their socioeconomic status and rise above the extensive competition of our globalized society. Consequently, this policy increased Korean parents’ financial burdens as they sought out private educations for their children. This educational migration began due to Korea’s active implementation of a globalization policy in combination with its admission to membership in the OECD in 1996.<sup>163</sup>

### Historical Background

In this section, the major historical influences of China, Japan, and the U.S. on Korean education are examined. They will offer clues to explain the educational crisis in contemporary Korea. This educational crisis is attributed to Korean students’ great efforts, including time, energy, and financial resources over a long period of time to prepare for the competitive college entrance examination. Korean mothers who are deeply involved in their children’s education play an important role in the education

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<sup>161</sup> Hyunjung Shin, 8-9.

<sup>162</sup> Young-ee Cho, 54-55.

<sup>163</sup> Yean-Ju Lee and Hagen Koo, 534.

crisis. According to Young-ee Cho, Korean mothers are victims of the crisis and main actors as well.<sup>164</sup> To explain why Korean students and parents expend so much effort on education, these three historical influences are discussed.

### Chinese Influence

The teachings of Confucius, a Chinese philosopher, have had a great impact on Korean culture and education. During the Yi dynasty, the emergence of Neo-Confucianism dominated the essential curriculum within the examination system. According to Hall and Ames, in pre-modern East Asia, the examination system became a useful means for government to create a “bureaucratic” and “administrative” model.<sup>165</sup> The examination system was virtually the only way for talented men to obtain high government offices, and it became the means to build meritocracy as the basis for governance.<sup>166</sup> Not only the candidates but also their families were honored and gained power and prestige after a successful examination. Thus, Korean society began to put a high priority on education. The Chinese educational model prevailed for a long time in Korea. As a result, all the relatives of a candidate became involved in this “examination hell” for the sake of upward social mobility and prestige.<sup>167</sup>

Similarly, in modern Korea, it has been important for males to enter one of the top-rated universities in order to improve opportunities for obtaining a good job and finding a wife from a wealthy family and finally, gaining a prosperous life.<sup>168</sup> Therefore, Korean families, especially Korean mothers, continue to spend a great deal of time,

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<sup>164</sup> Young-ee Cho, 144.

<sup>165</sup> David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking from Han: Self, Truth, and Transcendence in Chinese and Western Culture* (Albany: State University of NY Press, 1998), 37.

<sup>166</sup> Young-ee Cho, 109.

<sup>167</sup> Young-ee Cho, 110.

<sup>168</sup> Chisu Ko, “Peer Pressure Plastics,” *Time* 29 July 2002. 1 August.

energy, and money on preparing their children for the college entrance examination. Korean family members cooperate with each other and play their assigned roles, following the head of the family, to create a successful educational environment.<sup>169</sup>

Although other East Asian countries have similar Confucian practices, Korea follows Confucian ideas more extensively. The unique phenomenon of Kirogi family does not seem emerge in any other countries.<sup>170</sup> As a result, Korean parents experience more intense pressure than parents in other parts of the world. The motivation for Korean parents' sacrifices, as with Chinese and Japanese parents, is due to the expectation that they will be cared by their children in old age in a form of reciprocal dependency.<sup>171</sup>

#### Japanese Influence

Korea became a Japanese colony in 1910, and Japanese colonial rulers introduced their educational model in order to assimilate the Korean people. Japan also forced Koreans to speak only Japanese and have Japanese names.<sup>172</sup> It was tragic, because Koreans regarded losing their name as a loss of their identity, and this was shameful for the entire family and their ancestors.<sup>173</sup> Further, to display their authority and power, Japanese teachers wore swords in their classes and harshly treated Koreans.<sup>174</sup> Despite these bitter experiences, the Japanese model of education, with its highly centralized bureaucracy, laid the foundation for the modern national system of Korean education.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Clark W. Sorensen, "Success and Education in South Korea," *Comparative Education Review* 38, no. 1, (1994): 10-35.

<sup>170</sup> Michael J. Seth, *Education Fever: Society, Politics, and the Pursuit of Schooling in South Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), 4.

<sup>171</sup> Sorensen, 25.

<sup>172</sup> John K. Fairbank, Edwin O. Reischauer, and Albert M. Craig, *East Asia: Tradition and Transformation* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978), 881.

<sup>173</sup> Young-ee Cho, 121.

<sup>174</sup> Seth, 20.

<sup>175</sup> Seth, 18-19.

As a result, after Korea's liberation in 1945, the Korean noble class was substituted for the ruling Japanese elite and Confucian classics for modern Japanese education.<sup>176</sup>

The Japanese educational system reinforced the examination hell and focused on discipline, orderliness, and cleanliness.<sup>177</sup> Administratively, under a uniform system of mass education, all schools followed the same curriculum and used the same textbooks, and all teachers disciplined according to the strict regulations set down by the Education Bureau in Seoul.<sup>178</sup> This authoritarian education system was empowered further during the Korean War (1950 to 1953). After the war, the colonial education system was recovered for the purpose of providing mass education and protecting students from the ideology of communism.<sup>179</sup> The colonial education system affected Korean economic development in its early years and broadened and transplanted Japan's examination hell to Korea.<sup>180</sup> However, soon the younger generations were influenced by individualistic tendencies in the U.S.<sup>181</sup>

### U.S. Influence

U.S. influence on modern education in Korea began with Protestant Christian missionaries. Protestant missions were introduced to Korea in 1884, almost a century after the arrival of Catholicism.<sup>182</sup> They built Korea's first modern medical facilities and first modern schools. The government allowed Protestant missionaries to proselytize

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<sup>176</sup> Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 141.

<sup>177</sup> Seth, 29.

<sup>178</sup> Seth, 30.

<sup>179</sup> Young-ee Cho, 145.

<sup>180</sup> Seth, 31.

<sup>181</sup> Young-ee Cho, 145.

<sup>182</sup> Kyong Jae Kim, *Christianity and the Encounter of Asian Religions: Methods of Correlation, Fusion of Horizons, and Paradigm Shifts in the Korean Grafting Process* (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentru, 1994), 158.

freely for the sake of Korea's modernization. In 1898, the Korean government finally recognized freedom of religion in response to pressures from the West.<sup>183</sup> Protestantism grew fast in Korea, unlike in China and Japan. Koreans were devastated during the wars, including the Korean War, and they accepted Christianity as providing new hope for spiritual salvation.<sup>184</sup> After the Pyongyang spiritual revival in 1919, during which the power of the Holy Spirit anointed the church in Pyongyang, the Korean response to Christianity was unprecedented and Christianity reached masses of people.

Christianity contributed to Korea's enlightenment and modernization. Christians were engaged in education, medical services, and training new leaders in the country.<sup>185</sup> Christian teaching of the essential equality of all human beings attracted Korean people, especially women. The ministers preached the equality of the sexes, the prohibition of concubinage, and abolishment of early marriage. Moreover, the beginning of women's education offered them opportunities to find their potential and to participate in Korean society. Thus, women came to play very important roles in Korean churches. The embracement of the lower classes and women of Protestant Christianity contrasted greatly with Buddhism, Confucianism, and Catholicism.<sup>186</sup> The translation of the Bible into the Korean language appealed to the general public and affected the growth of Christianity. Most people could not read the Chinese characters in Buddhist and

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<sup>183</sup> Mary E. Connor, *The Koreas: A Global Studies Handbook* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC CLIO, 2002), 187.

<sup>184</sup> Nam Hyuck Jang, *Shamanism in Korean Christianity* (Seoul: Jimoondang, 2004), 54.

<sup>185</sup> Myung Keun Choi, *Changes in Korean Society between 1884-1910 as a Result of the Introduction of Christianity* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 15.

<sup>186</sup> Cho Kwang, "Human Relations as Expressed in Vernacular Catholic Writings of the Chosun Dynasty," in *Christianity in Korea*, ed. Robert E. Buswell Jr. and Timothy S. Lee (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 32.

Confucian writings.<sup>187</sup>

American missionaries attempted to improve Korea's educational system by eliminating "the fascist, militarist, and totalitarian nature of imperial Japanese education in [the] Korean education system and raising literacy by providing equal educational opportunity."<sup>188</sup> As a result, the noble class of pre-modern times in Korea was disempowered.<sup>189</sup> However, due to a lack of qualified Korean teachers and social and political chaos, the school system based on the Japanese colonial education system continued.<sup>190</sup> It has resulted in overemphasis of education again in contemporary Korea.<sup>191</sup>

After liberation from Japan, with all their good intentions and honest efforts, the U.S. military did not succeed in fully implementing the reform policies that were formulated to resolve the highly centralized bureaucracy of the educational system. It is because Japanese colonial education system remained and strengthened. The failure to establish a system of local school boards early on, for example, thwarted attempts to decentralize and democratize schooling in postwar Korea.<sup>192</sup>

### Cultural Background

Education fever in contemporary Korean society has been shaped in combination with a traditional education system that is attributed to Confucianism. Confucian values still influence Korean families and society. Therefore, to understand Korea's educational crisis today, it is necessary to explore the core cultural meanings of Confucianism in

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<sup>187</sup> Kyong Jae Kim, 117.

<sup>188</sup> Seth, 34-36.

<sup>189</sup> Donald N. Clark, *Christianity in Modern Korea* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986), 7.

<sup>190</sup> Young-ee Cho, 136-137.

<sup>191</sup> Seth, 40.

<sup>192</sup> Seth, 39.

Korean society. Although social and economic change has influenced the contemporary educational system in Korea, the Confucian tradition of examinations still remains. Educational zeal or education fever has appeared as a cultural trait related to Koreans' Confucian heritage.<sup>193</sup> The emphasis of Confucian values has been on harmony and peace in Korean society.<sup>194</sup>

### Confucianism

Classical Confucianism was first introduced to Korea around the first century, but it began affecting the Korean value system around the third or fourth century.<sup>195</sup> Confucianism has never had an overall impact on Chinese society, although it originated in China; it was only in Korea that Confucianism influenced the entire society.<sup>196</sup> Confucianism gained power in 1392 during the Yi Dynasty, when it became the state religion.<sup>197</sup> It's highly ethical system has deeply influenced the culture of Korea, but more as a philosophy than as a religion.<sup>198</sup> One of its religious aspects was ancestor worship, which is the only actual religious element that remains. Therefore, it is argued that Confucianism is not a religion, because there is no "religious structure or doctrine of the immortality of the soul."<sup>199</sup> The kings of the Yi Dynasty attempted to promote Neo-Confucianism; thus, Korea's culture became rooted in that Chinese philosophy.<sup>200</sup>

The new literati class of the fourteenth century made Neo-Confucianism their

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<sup>193</sup> Hyunjung Shin, 59.

<sup>194</sup> Young-ee Cho, 104.

<sup>195</sup> Kyong Jae Kim, 87.

<sup>196</sup> James Huntley Grayson, *Korea: A Religious History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 274; Edward Ben Adams, *Korea Guide: A Glimpse of Korean's Cultural Legacy* (Seoul: Seoul Tourist Publishing Company, 1983), 238.

<sup>197</sup> Jon Carter Covell, *Korea's Cultural Roots* (Salt Lake City: Moth House, 1982), 17.

<sup>198</sup> Roy E. Shearer, *Wildfire: Church Growth in Korea* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1966), 27.

<sup>199</sup> Kyong Jae Kim, 91.

<sup>200</sup> Covell, 17.

spiritual basis.<sup>201</sup> The concept of Heaven gradually changed to have a philosophical interpretation, and Neo-Confucianism began to lose its religious function and power. Neo-Confucianism attempted to secularize and construct a proper ethic in human terms. Confucianism came to function as the national ideology, ruling social and moral norms.<sup>202</sup> It was for the elites. However, common people could not find religious satisfaction in Neo-Confucianism, and it also did not affect their inner attitudes. The rulers or elites neglected the needs of the general public and their spiritual desires. As a result, people began to seek religious fulfillment in Shamanism or Buddhism. Gradually, Confucianism in Korea became merged with other traditional religions in order to keep its religiosity. Confucius' understanding of humans lies in inequality, especially between men and women and between elites and non-elites.<sup>203</sup>

### Traditional Korean Family

Since this section overlaps with the section on the influence of traditional Korean women's roles and status found in the literature review in introduction, the topic is covered briefly here. In Confucianism, the family is the basic social unit for national honor.<sup>204</sup> It is considered a family-oriented religion, philosophy, and social ideology practiced in daily life.<sup>205</sup> In the Confucian structure, nation, family, and individual are all intermingled and not easy to separate. There are set hierarchical relationships between the government and citizens, parents and children, husbands and wives, older siblings and

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<sup>201</sup> Covell, 91-93.

<sup>202</sup> Kyong Jae Kim, 59, 104.

<sup>203</sup> Bong Bae Park, "The Encounter of Christianity with Traditional Culture and Ethics in Korea: An Essay in Christian Self-Understanding" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1970), 36.

<sup>204</sup> Kwang Kyu Lee, "Confucian Tradition in the Contemporary Korean Family," in *Confucianism and the Family*, ed. Walter H. Slote and George A. De Vos (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 250.

<sup>205</sup> Kwang Kyu Lee, 250.



younger siblings, and older friends and younger friends.<sup>206</sup> The Yi dynasty regarded sacrifice as an essential virtue for effective relationships and a primary way of resolving conflict.<sup>207</sup> Filial piety, family ties, and obedience always were placed over individual needs in the traditional family.<sup>208</sup>

Korean Confucianism never abandons family relations for the sake of higher causes.<sup>209</sup> Young people are supposed to learn proper attitudes and prescribed behaviors in family settings. The basic relationship that serves as a standard for all other relationships is the father-son relationship. Parental love and nurturing are to be repaid by offspring: this is called “filial piety.”<sup>210</sup> There are three major paternal rights and duties: “representing the family in society, supervising family members, and controlling family property.”<sup>211</sup> The family can only be honored by sons through official appointment.<sup>212</sup> Family honor was more important than individual accomplishments. Sons are supposed to perform the ancestral worship and are responsible for the wellbeing of their departed parents. If a wife is not able to give birth to a son, the husband reserves the right to divorce her.<sup>213</sup>

Since the rights and responsibilities of parents come from heaven, children should

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<sup>206</sup> Mijung Park and Catherine Chesla, “Revisiting Confucianism as a Conceptual Framework for Asian Family Study,” *Journal of Family Nursing*, 13 no. 3 (2007): 310.

<sup>207</sup> Chul Woo Son, “The Motives of Self-Sacrifice in Korean American Culture, Family, and Marriage: From Filial Piety to Familial Integrity” (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2010), 15.

<sup>208</sup> Chul Woo Son, 18.

<sup>209</sup> Nam Hyuck Jang, 127.

<sup>210</sup> Kwang Kyu Lee, 251.

<sup>211</sup> Kwang Kyu Lee, 252.

<sup>212</sup> Nam-soon Kang, “Confucian Familism and Its Social/Religious Embodiment in Christianity: Reconsidering the Family Discourse from a Feminist Perspective,” *Asia Journal of Theology*, 18 no. 1 (April 2004): 173.

<sup>213</sup> Nam-soon Kang, 173.

obey their parents.<sup>214</sup> Otherwise, they act against heaven's will. Unruly children were supposed to be excluded from their clan because they ruined family honor and caused their families to lose face. Therefore, parents usually disciplined their children strictly to protect their futures, both at familial and at national levels. Likewise, the Confucian Korean family was a typical patriarchy. There was a division of roles between husbands and wives: the husband was called the "outside master," while the wife was called the "inside master."<sup>215</sup>

As noted earlier, the hierarchical relationship between husbands and wives was strictly observed in Korean families. The wife was supposed to sacrifice herself completely to serve her husband and family. This unequal relationship was even extended to the relationship with her father and son, which is called "the rule of three obediences: A wife is supposed to obey her father before marriage, to obey her husband after marriage, and to obey her son after her husband's death."<sup>216</sup> There were also seven vices that were valid reasons for divorce by the husband: "disobedience to the husband's parents, failing to bear a son, adultery, jealousy, contracting a harmful disease, malicious gossip, and theft."<sup>217</sup> Women are not allowed to act autonomously and are considered dependent on male relatives.<sup>218</sup>

Under the Koroy dynasty (918-1392), women enjoyed social and economic

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<sup>214</sup> Kwang Kyu Lee, 252.

<sup>215</sup> Kwang Kyu Lee, 252.

<sup>216</sup> Park and Lee, "Confucianism and the Korean Family," 124.

<sup>217</sup> Nam-soon Kang, "Creating 'Dangerous Memory': Challenges for Asian and Korean Feminist Theology," *Ecumenical Review* 47, no. 1 (Jan 1995): 24.

<sup>218</sup> Insook Han Park and Jay-Cho Lee, 117-134.

freedom, having an equal relationship with their brothers.<sup>219</sup> Even after divorce, their status and attractiveness were not diminished, and no social stigma marked them. In contrast, during the Yi dynasty (1392-1910), the most important book for explaining the roles of women was *Naehun (Instructions for Women)*. According to this book, there are four ideal womanly behaviors: “moral conduct, proper speech, proper appearance, and womanly tasks.”<sup>220</sup> Women need not be clever, talented, verbal, or beautiful, but ought to be quiet, disciplined, clean, dutiful, and hospitable. In this book, the married woman’s roles are explained as being a self-sacrificing daughter-in-law, an obedient and dutiful wife, and a wise and caring mother.<sup>221</sup> During the Yi dynasty, elite women were not supposed to participate in non-domestic activities, so they were confined to home.<sup>222</sup>

#### Changes in Confucian Values

Even in the 1970s, with the emergence of the middle-class, women’s roles were restricted to being a non-paid domestic worker and an affectionate mother who raised high achieving children. However, in 1991, family law was revised through the effort of coalitions of women’s organizations to remove discrimination against women in terms of marriage, family, and kinship. The reform of family law meant a threat to the existing order, not only in the family but also in the nation.<sup>223</sup> As a result, women came to have greater equality than ever before. With a revision of the traditional law, the mother came to have the same custodial rights to her children as the father when parents divorced.

Another change came in the inheritance law, which now guarantees the rights of the wife,

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<sup>219</sup> Martina Deuchler, “Propagating Female Virtues in Choson Korea,” in *Women and Confucian Cultures in Premodern China, Korea, and Japan*, ed. Dorothy Ko, Jehyun Kim Haboush, and Joan R. Piggott (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 143.

<sup>220</sup> Martina Deuchler et al., 5-6.

<sup>221</sup> Chul Woo Son, 33

<sup>222</sup> Martina Deuchler, 142.

<sup>223</sup> Jaeyeon Chung, 40.

sons, and daughters; both male and female children are responsible for taking care of their parents when they become old.<sup>224</sup>

Kwang Kyu Lee describes how parental roles have changed in modern Korean families.<sup>225</sup> The mother is no longer presented as an affectionate person but as one in charge of supervision, education, and punishment, because the father has no time to spend with his children or discipline them. The father in modern times seems to be losing his position of authority. Lee also describes two types of contemporary parental attitudes: overprotection of the child and excessive permissiveness. Middle-class mothers with a high level of education tend to devote themselves exclusively to their children. They intervene in school activities, supplementary schools, and even their children's selection of friends in order to fulfill their personal expectations and ambitions. Chisu Ko cites Dr. Shim Hyung Bo, a plastic surgeon practicing in Seoul: "Parents make their kids get plastic surgery, just like they make them study. They realize looks are important for success."<sup>226</sup> Ko determines that Korean parents are very competitive and afraid of their children falling behind, not just academically but also aesthetically.<sup>227</sup>

On the other hand, among poorer families, the mother has little time to devote to her children.<sup>228</sup> Nonetheless, Kwang Kyu Lee asserts, both poor and rich families place the greatest emphasis on education. Parents sacrifice and devote themselves to their children's welfare. According to him, education is the key to the maintenance of status or upward social mobility, but only the upper classes have access to prime educational

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<sup>224</sup> Uichol Kim et al., 342.

<sup>225</sup> Kwang Kyu Lee, 254-263.

<sup>226</sup> Chisu Ko, "Peer Pressure Plastics," *Time* 29 July 2002. 1 August.

<sup>227</sup> Kwang Kyu Lee, 254-263.

<sup>228</sup> Kwang Kyu Lee, 254-263.

opportunities. Educational achievement in modern times is related to the prosperity and reputation of the family in traditional Confucian society.

Many Korean mothers fully focus on their children's educations, leaving behind their desires for self-realization as career women.<sup>229</sup> Therefore, it can be said that the role of motherhood still emphasizes the traditional characteristic of self-sacrifice although they are conflicted between being housewives and the desire to be self-fulfillment. Working mothers who do not care for their families are called selfish mothers.<sup>230</sup> Most Korean mothers feel heavily burdened with the task of educating their children. One article reports that most Korean mothers worry about their children's education, regardless of region, age, and employment status and some revealed that their heaviest burden is their children's private tutoring costs.<sup>231</sup> While the social and political chaos of early modern times has brought profound changes to the educational system in Korea, much of the Confucian tradition of examination-centered education still characterizes much of modern education in Korea.

In sum, due to the revision of family law in 1991, women gained a higher position than they had held before. However, as parental roles also have changed, mothers are more burdened as they take on traditional paternal roles, such as supervision, education, and discipline. Although they experience conflict between self-sacrifice and self-fulfillment, Korean mothers, especially middle-class women, focus greatly on their children's education as a life goal because they identify their children's achievements—which guarantee prosperity and upward social mobility—as being their achievements.

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<sup>229</sup> Young-ee Cho, 69.

<sup>230</sup> Young-ee Cho, 92.

<sup>231</sup> "Korean Mothers--Intriguing Mix of Old and New Views," *Chosun-Ilbo*, April 28, 2005.

### The Korean Immigrant Church in the U.S.

Korean immigrant churches have played a crucial role in the lives of Korean immigrants as practical, emotional, and spiritual supports.<sup>232</sup> There has been much research that focuses on the importance of religion for the adjustment of Korean immigrants in the United States. However, there are few studies on the religious life of Korean Kirogi families in the U.S. The relationship between religion and immigrant life is very tight for Asian immigrants.<sup>233</sup> Bo Yong Lee notes that immigrant churches offer a sense of belonging, fellowship, and social services as well as a faith community. She further observes that immigrant churches can be refuges for immigrants who experience a painful reality in terms of language barriers, cultural differences, and racial prejudices in a strange place.<sup>234</sup> Bo Yong Lee considers immigrant congregations as providing “spiritual homes for uprooted homeless immigrants.”<sup>235</sup> Even religion serves to connect immigrants with their home country.

### Christianity in Korea

Christianity in Korea has been influenced by and coexisted with Confucianism. In this regard, it is crucial to investigate the development of Protestant Christianity in Korea to understand how it operates in Christian Kirogi mothers’ minds and their adjustments to Korean immigrant churches. As Christianity has been introduced in Korea, a dialogue has emerged between the creative self-interpretation of the Korean mind and the essence of

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<sup>232</sup> Bo Yong Lee, “Rethinking Assimilation through the Lens of Transnational Migration: Transnational Religious Activities of Korean Immigrants” (Ph.D. diss., University of Denver, 2010), 74.

<sup>233</sup> Pyong Gap Min and Jung Ha Kim, eds., *Religions in Asian America: Building Faith Communities* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002), 5.

<sup>234</sup> Bo Yong Lee, 59.

<sup>235</sup> Bo Yong Lee, 59.

the new religion as introduced from outside the culture.<sup>236</sup> However, in the beginning, Korean Christian converts accepted Christianity with a total rejection of their religious past, so they were not able to understand its central message deeply.<sup>237</sup> Currently, Korean Christians attempt to reflect critically on either traditional culture or Christianity itself.<sup>238</sup>

Protestantism grew fast in Korea, unlike in China and Japan. The Protestant Church of South Korea became one of the most dynamic in the world. There are several reasons for this fast growth. First, people came to church to seek a spiritual haven or because of the messianic hope of Christianity.<sup>239</sup> The severe psychological pressures under which Koreans were living during difficult historical periods contributed to the growth of Christianity.<sup>240</sup> Koreans, who were devastated during the wars, including the Korean War, accepted Christianity as providing new hope for spiritual salvation.<sup>241</sup> Second, Protestant Christian leaders were politically involved to some extent. For example, when Korea was under the control of Japan, many Christians participated in anti-Japanese politics, such as the March First Movement, Korean challenge to suppression under the Japanese colony and they demonstrated against Japanese demands, such as worshipping at Japanese Shinto shrines.<sup>242</sup> Third, Christianity contributed to Korea's enlightenment and modernization. Christianity was engaged in education, medical services, and training new leaders in the country.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Kyong Jae Kim, 107.

<sup>237</sup> Bong Bae Park, "The Encounter of Christianity," 150-152.

<sup>238</sup> Chin Hong Chung, "Encounter with the Difference: Christian Culture and Korean Religious Culture," in *Theology of Korean Culture*, ed. Theology of Korean Culture Society (Seoul: Christian Literature Society of Korea, 2002), 32.

<sup>239</sup> Bong Bae Park, 160.

<sup>240</sup> Connor, 187.

<sup>241</sup> Nam Hyuck Jang, 54.

<sup>242</sup> Connor, 187.

<sup>243</sup> Myung Keun Choi, 15

By 1997, there were approximately 100,000 Protestant ministers and more than 160 Protestant denominations in Korea.<sup>244</sup> Despite its' fast growth, Korean Protestantism also has negative aspects. First, it has an exclusivist attitude, rejecting traditional culture and other religions, treating them as idol worship.<sup>245</sup> Korean Protestantism was affected by the fundamentalist revival in the United States, so the Korean church remained conservative and fundamentalism has become the major trend in the formation of Korean theology until the 1930s.<sup>246</sup>

Second, the Christian faith is somewhat mixed with the Shamanistic tradition, which heavily focuses on personal blessings. As a result, churches tend to emphasize individual church growth and denominationalism, ignoring the ecumenical spirit of the universal church. One of the examples is Yoido Full Gospel Church, the largest church in the world, which presents an evangelical message that has attracted huge audiences, especially with its emphasis on a threefold blessing: "Christ brings health, prosperity, and salvation."<sup>247</sup> Prosperity depends on acceptance of the Holy Spirit, who offers health, material success in this world, and salvation after death. Illness, poverty, and misfortune come from sin and the failure to live according to one's spiritual calling.<sup>248</sup> Attendees' experiences of high emotional excitement and psychological relief from frustration during revival meetings are influenced by Shamanistic ecstasy and Buddhist escapism.<sup>249</sup>

On the other hand, Confucianism contributed to the success of Protestant Christianity in Korea in positive and negative ways. Most of all, the Christian gospel was

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<sup>244</sup> Connor, 188.

<sup>245</sup> Kyong Jae Kim, 120.

<sup>246</sup> Kyong Jae Kim, 122.

<sup>247</sup> Nam Hyuck Jang, 81.

<sup>248</sup> Connor 188.

<sup>249</sup> Bong Bae Park, 228.



a liberating gospel for the Korean people under the feudalistic Confucian ruling ideology, although Christianity could not successfully transform the culture and society.<sup>250</sup> One of the positive influences is that the concept of *Chun* (Heaven) prepared the Korean people to understand spiritual presence and sincerity in one's ethical life.<sup>251</sup> There are also negative impacts. Confucianism has tolerated other religious practices as long as they did not interfere with the official social norms. Thus, Confucianism has ruled almost every aspect of Korean people's lives, with the exceptions of their personal lives and religious beliefs and practices. This dualistic pattern contributed somewhat to the way Koreans received Christianity so that Christians tend to separate religion and ethics. Consequently, Christianity has affected private religious life but not the patterns of daily life.<sup>252</sup>

The concept of the individual in Confucianism is based on the "innate goodness of man," in whom ethical norms are immanent. The innate goodness of humans in Confucianism can be considered an "idolatry of self-sufficiency" in Christianity. Likewise, the Confucian attitude of self-righteousness and stubbornness has affected Korean Christians.<sup>253</sup> Confucius' understanding of humans lies in inequality, especially between men and women and between elites and non-elites.<sup>254</sup> This inequality has been reflected in Christian life, making marriages hierarchical and putting "elite members" in higher positions in the church.<sup>255</sup>

According to Minjung theologians, Christianity contributed to awakening the consciences of women so that they found their potentiality and began to seek their

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<sup>250</sup> Bong Bae Park, 257.

<sup>251</sup> Kyong Jae Kim, 186.

<sup>252</sup> Bong Bae Park, 61-62.

<sup>253</sup> Bong Bae Park, 205-227.

<sup>254</sup> Bong Bae Park, 98.

<sup>255</sup> Nam Hyuck Jang, 131.

freedom.<sup>256</sup> In the exclusive Confucian family system, emotional ties within the family are dominant. This familial exclusiveness is challenged by the Christian concept of universal sister- and brotherhood, which relies on the equality of human beings.<sup>257</sup> Korean Confucianism never renounces family relations for the sake of higher causes. In relation to this, the emphasis on harmony in society, especially within the web of family relationships, was maintained in Christianity. Hence, many Korean Christians seek out God for the benefit of their families. Family cohesion hinders transforming this biblically unacceptable traditional worldview and value system of family-centered selfishness.<sup>258</sup>

#### Roles of the Korean Immigrant Church

During the early stage of settlement, Korean immigrant churches become the center of religious and social life for Korean immigrants and Korean Kirogi mothers.<sup>259</sup> Won Moo Hurh and Kwangchung Kim state that the role of Korean Protestant churches is crucial, because a lot of Korean immigrants attend church. According to them, over 70% of Korean immigrants in the Los Angeles and Chicago areas attend church every week, including fellowship gatherings, Bible studies, and counseling services.<sup>260</sup> One article reports that more than 4,000 Korean churches existed in the U.S. in 2009, with 1,300 in California and 441 in New York.<sup>261</sup> Among them, 1,639 were Presbyterian, 462 were Methodist, 289 were Pentecostal, and 175 were Baptist. Thus, the role of Korean Christian immigrant congregations is very important.

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<sup>256</sup> Sang Taek Lee, *Religion and Social Formation in Korea: Minjung and Millenarianism* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1996), 133.

<sup>257</sup> Sang Taek Lee, 233, 244.

<sup>258</sup> Nam Hyuck Jang, 127.

<sup>259</sup> Kyung Ju Ahn, 105.

<sup>260</sup> Won Moo Hurh and Kwang Chung Kim, "Religious Participation of Korean Immigrants in the United States," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 29, no.1 (1990): 19-34.

<sup>261</sup> Bo Yong Lee, 74.

Hurh and Kim illustrates that immigrants attend church to fulfill their need for religious purpose, social needs, and psychological needs.<sup>262</sup> For Korean immigrants, the immigrant church is like a home, a family, and a Korean community. They state that one of the positive functions of Korean Protestant immigrant churches is providing practical help to adjust to life in a new environment. On the other hand, one negative effect of Korean Protestant immigrant churches is that Korean immigrants and their children develop different lifestyles.<sup>263</sup> Another negative effect of Korean immigrant churches is the sustaining of traditional models in the church, such as male dominance and valuing women's silence and submission to men in public life.<sup>264</sup>

Heejung Kwon argues that Korean immigrants are struggling with cultural differences between traditional and contemporary Korean culture and value systems, Christian culture, and American culture.<sup>265</sup> Korean women are usually found in the pews and in the kitchen, while Korean men are positioned at the center of the church.<sup>266</sup> This structure and strict division of roles between men and women is oppressive to women and detrimental to men as well. Korean Kirogi mothers in particular experience stigmatization, because they are not considered as fulfilling their roles as wives and because they do not have a male head in their homes. They have to deal with the existence of multiple and differing power relations in their lives. In sum, the dual roles of

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<sup>262</sup> Won Moo Hurh and Kwang Chung Kim, 19-34.

<sup>263</sup> Kwang Chung Kim, R. Stephen Warner, and Ho-Youn Kwon, "Korean American Religion in International Perspective," in *Korean Americans and Their Religions: Pilgrims and Missionaries from a Different Shore*, ed. Ho Youn Kwon, Kwang Chung Kim, and R. Stephen Warner, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 13.

<sup>264</sup> Ai Ra Kim, 73.

<sup>265</sup> Heejung Kwon, 55.

<sup>266</sup> Soyoung Park, "The Intersection of Religion, Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Identity Formation of Korean American Evangelical Women," in Kwon, Kim, and Warner, 202.

Korean immigrant churches are both oppressive and liberative for Korean American women.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> Heejung Kwon, 55.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

This dissertation involves the methods of both hermeneutics and empirical research. I employed a practical theology research framework in which the phenomenological method was used to understand the phenomenon of Korean Kirogi mothers. The focus of this study is to provide insight, analysis, and validation of the real life experiences of Kirogi mothers in interaction with the theoretical resources of psychology, theology, and cultural context by using a mutually critical correlational method of practical theology. Thus, this study provides insights regarding the life experiences of Kirogi mothers, and it reveals some of the ways they can be empowered. In these ways, this study will contribute to the fields of practical theology and pastoral care and counseling.

Swinton and Mowat discuss the use of qualitative research in practical theology. Practical theology, as an interpretive discipline, provides new and challenging insights into Christian truth dealing with questions that emerge from current life situations.<sup>268</sup> In this process, qualitative research methods play an important role of enabling the process of theological reflection on particular situations.<sup>269</sup> Browning maintains that good practical theological thinking and acting is based on detailed descriptions of the concrete empirical reality of the context.<sup>270</sup> After the first pre-reflective phase in which the researcher explores the nature of the situation, the researcher is enabled to develop a

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<sup>268</sup> John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 26.

<sup>269</sup> Swinton and Mowat, 97.

<sup>270</sup> Don S. Browning, "Pastoral Care and the Study of the Congregation," in *Beyond Clericalism: The Congregation as a Focus for Theological Education*, eds. Jr. Joseph C. Hough Jr. and Barbara G. Wheeler (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 103.

deeper understanding of the situation by applying qualitative research methods in the next step. This analysis becomes the source for theological reflection in which the researcher reflects on what she or he has found from a theological perspective.<sup>271</sup>

### Method

#### Practical Theological Method: Mutually Critical Correlational Method

This dissertation seeks to provide a space where women's lived experiences and the resources of theology and social sciences have a critical dialogue that is mutually influencing. Since practical theology is operational theology, it requires empirical method, too. Denise Ackerman emphasizes the importance of theological reflection of faith in the exercise of practical theology.<sup>272</sup> At the same time, for her, the empirical method is also essential to practical theology; both of theoretical and empirical are indispensable. Practical theology contains both theological theory and praxis. For the mutual critical dialogue, it is necessary to provide basic understanding of the discipline of practical theology as well as its methods. Then, the development of practical theology is described first.

John Reader reveals that the scope of practical theology has been expanding over the past 100 years.<sup>273</sup> Practical theology was first used in the German Protestant tradition as part of the academic theological curriculum in the late eighteenth century. Their concern is building "theoretical theological and ethical frameworks" in understanding

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<sup>271</sup> Swinton and Mowat, 94-98.

<sup>272</sup> Denise Ackermann, "Liberation and Practical Theology: A Feminist Perspective on Ministry," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 52 (Summer 1985): 30

<sup>273</sup> John Reader, *Reconstructing Practical Theology: The Impact of Globalization* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2009), 6-7.

issues and situations.<sup>274</sup> Schleiermacher, the father of practical theology, regarded practical theology as applied science. The core belief of his work was a “subject” that focused on individualism.<sup>275</sup> In the twentieth century, both professionalism and secularism arose, and the role of minister became “pastoral professional” who carry out the tasks of ministry for the community.<sup>276</sup> Over the past 50 years, the fields of psychology and therapeutic knowledge that is related to the study of the human person significantly influenced practical and pastoral theology.<sup>277</sup> The development of practical theology starts from its earlier form, pastoral theology.

For the most of the twentieth century, the predominant model of pastoral theology stressed the theory and practice of individual care, prominently informed by the therapeutic models of the modern psychologies.<sup>278</sup> Contemporary pastoral theology in the U.S. was originated from the thought of William James, Anton Boisen, and Seward Hiltner. They developed the tradition of pastoral theology in the graduate programs in which psychology was brought into theological education, in Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) and in pastoral care and counseling. William James’s emphasis on function and thick description contributed to modern pastoral theology’s focus on experience. In the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, the significant part of religious ministry was occupied by chaplains, pastoral counselors, and CPE supervisors in the US.<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> James Woodward and Stephen Pattison, eds. *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 3.

<sup>275</sup> Gerben Heitink, *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains: Manual for Practical Theology*, Translated by Reinder Bruijsma (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 19-34.

<sup>276</sup> Heitink, 66-99.

<sup>277</sup> Reader, 6-7.

<sup>278</sup> Robin W. Lovin, *The Real Task of Practical Theology* 5, no. 12 (Feb 1992): 125-128.

<sup>279</sup> John Patton, “Introduction to Modern Pastoral Theology in the United States,” in Woodward & Pattison, 49-53.

The logic-centered theology has moved to “living human document” as a subject of study demonstrated by Boisen and Hiltner who used psychological insights and case study methods.<sup>280</sup> Hiltner, in 1958, attempted to unite the various practical disciplines of theology under practical theology. The arising of disciplinary specialties such as psychology of religion, religious education, and pastoral care and counseling become alternatives.<sup>281</sup> However, as time has focused on professionalism, there have been more divisions. Moore presents that during the past twenty five years, practical theologians have different aims and approaches of practical theology in the United States, and each makes distinctive contributions. Their common concerns are “theological reflection” on experiences and actions, “theological constructs,” and the contribution of “theological reflection to understanding of experience and direction for action.”<sup>282</sup> It focused on more practical theology than therapeutic practice because of the contextual nature of pastoral care.<sup>283</sup>

Correlation method of Paul Tillich has influenced the emergence of liberation theologies.<sup>284</sup> Tillich’s correlational method raises a question from human experience and answers it through Scripture and the Christian tradition.<sup>285</sup> However, it is criticized as a uni-directional model of reflection which does not allow the world to question interpretations of Christian truth. Then, David Tracy expanded Tillich’s model as he

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<sup>280</sup> Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, “Practical Theology,” in *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. Dawn DeVries and Brian Gerrish (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, forthcoming), [4].

<sup>281</sup> Mary Elizabeth Moore, “Purposes of Practical Theology: A Comparative Analysis between United States Practical Theologians and Johannes Van der Ven.” in *Hermeneutics and Empirical Research in Practical Theology*, edited by Chris A.M. Hermans and Mary E. Moore (Leiden : Brill, 2004), 175.

<sup>282</sup> Moore, “Purposes of Practical Theology,” 182.

<sup>283</sup> Carrie Doehring, “A Method of Feminist Pastoral Theology,” 100.

<sup>284</sup> Miller-McLemore, “Practical Theology,” [4-5].

<sup>285</sup> Swinton and Mowat, 73-98.



attempted mutually critical dialogue between “interpretations of the Christian message and interpretation of contemporary cultural experiences.”<sup>286</sup> This mutually critical correlational method is beyond Tillich’s and takes a more critical position toward Christian tradition. It does not assume that the answers given by the religious tradition have necessary priority to other sources within the dialogue.<sup>287</sup> He understands theology as a discipline that “articulates mutually critical correlations between the meaning and truth of an interpretation of the Christian fact and the meaning and truth of an interpretation of the contemporary situation.”<sup>288</sup> Mutually critical correlations require “the questions and responses of both phenomena, the Christian tradition and the contemporary situation.”<sup>289</sup> Tracy also focuses on the importance of interpretation to bridge between Christian tradition and the contemporary situation.

So far, I have reviewed literature on the historical development of practical theology, including that regarding the practical theological method. In particular, since this dissertation deals with women’s experiences, I use the mutual critical correlational method of feminist pastoral theology. Doehring maintains that contemporary feminist practical theology mostly uses a critical correlational method that relates feminist/gender studies, social scientific studies, and theological studies.<sup>290</sup> She suggests that feminist pastoral theology starts with practice, is mutual, and values critical reflection. Zoë Bennett Moore also argues that the method of critical correlation makes possible mutual

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<sup>286</sup> Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 46.

<sup>287</sup> Swinton and Mowat, 79.

<sup>288</sup> David Tracy, “The Foundations of Practical Theology,” in *Practical Theology*, ed. Don S. Browning (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 62.

<sup>289</sup> Tracy, “Foundations,” 63.

<sup>290</sup> Doehring, “A Method of Feminist Pastoral Theology,” 95-111.

dialogue and critique when integrating theology and secular disciplines for pastoral theology.<sup>291</sup>

Employing the method developed by Carrie Doehring, a feminist practical theologian, this study is pastorally theological, feminist, accountable, and places final authority on transforming structures using the Christian tradition.<sup>292</sup> First, “pastorally theological” means that the role of the method is to bridge disciplinary theoretical perspectives, such as those of theology, psychology, and gender studies, with practice. Therefore, in this dissertation, I use theology, psychology, and gender-studies, including resources related to Korean or Korean immigrant women, to develop a method of care for Korean Christian Kirogi mothers. I also use diverse feminist theologies from post-cultural, postmodern, and postcolonial studies.

Secondly, Doehring notes that a feminist practical method must use feminist perspectives that are poststructuralist, contextual, and pragmatic.<sup>293</sup> Poststructural means there are no deep structures or universal truths in life experiences; rather, they always have multiple meanings. In meaning making, the hidden and developed values are investigated and used in opposition to preexisting values. These meanings are always contextual and pragmatic so they can be used to shape the practice of ministry. By contextual, Doehring means that the particularities of women’s life experiences shape meaning. Because feminist pastoral theologians ultimately take action based on their consideration of women’s identity in terms of age, gender, sexual orientation, and race, this poststructuralist feminism is ultimately pragmatic. Thus, using feminist perspectives,

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<sup>291</sup> Zoë Bennett Moore, *Introducing Feminist Perspectives on Pastoral Theology* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2002), 2.

<sup>292</sup> Doehring, “Method,” 96-104.

<sup>293</sup> Doehring, “Method,” 96-104.

my focus on Korean Kirogi Christian mothers' adjustment is contextual and pragmatic. I also explore the multiple meanings of truth regarding their life experiences.

Thirdly, Carrie Doehring stresses accountability in feminist practical theological study so that readers can understand the explicit sources and norms used by the author. In this regard, to explore the issues related to Kirogi mothers' adjustment, I give authoritative weight to literature from feminist psychology and counseling, Christian scholarship, and gender studies, along with my understanding of Korean culture. Fourthly, Doehring's ultimate purpose in her construction of feminist pastoral theology is to use her Christian tradition to transform intrapsychic, familial, and cultural structures of practices.<sup>294</sup> In relation to this goal, this methodology is used to engage in a dialogue to claim marginalized voices and to alleviate the suffering of Korean Christian Kirogi mothers and their families and their experiences in the Korean communities and Korean immigrant churches.

In conclusion, the overall practical theological method in this dissertation is mutually critical correlational, involving interdisciplinary, feminist, and hermeneutical lenses utilizing Doehring's feminist pastoral method, that emphasize dialogue with sources and norms interpreted from feminist perspectives to propose concrete strategies for pastoral practice.

#### Qualitative Empirical Research Method: Hermeneutic Phenomenological Method

As described above, this practical theological study raises questions and answers from Kirogi mothers' experiences, Christian theology, and other resources. Then it makes possible a mutual dialogue among them. As a way of understanding Kirogi mothers'

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<sup>294</sup> Doehring, "Method," 96-104.

lived experience, qualitative empirical research is used. The qualitative research method utilized for this project is phenomenology. Through the phenomenological method, Kirogi mothers' experiences can be deeply understood within the Korean social, cultural, and religious contexts.

The foundation for the phenomenological movement was laid by Edmund Husserl.<sup>295</sup> He maintains that the source of knowledge of objective phenomena is from subjective experience. According to him, all humans experience the world through their conscious awareness. Husserl suggests that researchers need to bracket their beliefs and assumptions so as not to be biased in describing participants' life worlds. On the other hand, Martin Heidegger, who extended the phenomenological movement, asserted that human beings are not separable from our world and therefore, presuppositions cannot be bracketed.<sup>296</sup> Heidegger expanded hermeneutics, the study of interpretation, by including interpretation of human experience of the world through the use of language to provide both understanding and knowledge. His use of hermeneutical inquiry in interpretation discloses hidden meanings as a way of understanding the nature of ontology.<sup>297</sup> Heidegger elucidated that we are always living hermeneutically, and our experiences need to be understood by consideration of historical social contexts.<sup>298</sup> While Husserl focuses on "description" of the lived experience of the participants, Heidegger emphasizes the "interpretation" of the researcher.<sup>299</sup> Van Manen states, "human science is

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<sup>295</sup> Max van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 45-47.

<sup>296</sup> Claire Burke Draucher, "The Critique of Heideggerian Hermeneutical Nursing Research," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 30, no. 21(Aug 1999): 361.

<sup>297</sup> Mauren Dowling, "Hermeneutics: An Exploration," *Nursing Researcher* 11, no. 4 (2004): 32.

<sup>298</sup> Draucher, 361.

<sup>299</sup> John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2007), 58-60.

the study of meaning: descriptive-interpretive studies of patterns, structures and levels of experiential and/or textual meanings.”<sup>300</sup> For him, all knowledge about the phenomenon cannot be completely bracketed.

Swinton and Mowat point out tensions between the two perspectives of hermeneutics and phenomenology. While phenomenology seeks to explain people’s experiences in an objective and unbiased way, hermeneutics holds that interpretation, bias, and prejudice are crucial to how we encounter the world.<sup>301</sup> However, both of these perspectives can be brought together in order to provide a rich description of an experience and a necessary interpretative perspective on lived experience.<sup>302</sup> The approach of phenomenology is utilized to access the inner experiences of research subjects and to engage in a search for meaning and truth in relation the topic, and in the end, it is the capacity of the researcher to see and understand that makes the difference.<sup>303</sup>

### Data Collection

Data in phenomenological study are the descriptions about experiences and meaning. I submitted a written research plan to the Claremont School of Theology (CST) Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval prior to beginning the data collection. I also completed computer-based training on the Protection of Human Participants in Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) and received approval from the CST IRB. (See Appendix D). And then, in order to recruit research partners, I used the snowball sampling method. Beginning in May 2012, I first recruited a research partner

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<sup>300</sup> Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 181.

<sup>301</sup> Swinton and Mowat, 108.

<sup>302</sup> Swinton and Mowat, 109.

<sup>303</sup> John McLeod, *Qualitative Research in Counseling and Psychotherapy* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2001), 55.

from a circle of people with whom I was acquainted and through word of mouth by persons known to both me and this research partner. And then, I asked the research partner nominate other Kirogi mothers and then, I interviewed these new Kirogi mothers and continued in the same way until the material became saturated.

The research partners were to be Christian Korean Kirogi mothers who came to the U.S. from Korea before 2008 and who currently attend a Protestant Korean immigrant church in the Los Angeles metropolitan area. Since phenomenological studies seek depth rather than breadth, I continued interview with new research partner until the saturation point at which I began to hear the same information from participants was reached.<sup>304</sup> Finally, fourteen Christian Kirogi mothers were interviewed. The interviews were conducted at a location mutually agreed upon by both research partner and interviewer. Each interview took from one and one half to two hours to complete. After completing the interview, research partners were given \$10 cash or a gift card.

Semi-structured interviews with Christian Kirogi mothers serve as the basis for a construction of a thick description of the Kirogi mothers' experiences. Open-ended guided questions were used during individual interviews to probe a wide variety of Kirogi mothers' adjustment processes (see Appendix C). While I focused on the particular experience of being a Kirogi mother in each interview, I also tried to cover the major events of research partners' life stories regarding their adjustment issues. In this process, I focused on different aspects of their experiences.

The following overarching questions guided the framing of my interview questions to explore the phenomenon of Kirogi mothers' adjustment:

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<sup>304</sup> Irving Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2006), 55.

1. What is the meaning of Christian Kirogi mothers' decision to become Kirogi mothers, and how do their Christian beliefs interplay with cultural beliefs in their choice to become Kirogi mothers?
2. What are Christian Kirogi mothers' difficulties as they adjust to living in the new culture of the U.S. and engage in parenting their children?
3. What kinds of messages do they hear, explicitly and implicitly, from both the Korean community and their Korean immigrant churches? What roles do Korean cultural and Christian beliefs play in silence, isolation, and marginalization in Korean immigrant churches in the U.S.?
4. How do they engage in church activities and seek support? What are their expectations of the church?

The in-depth, one-on-one interviews were conducted in the Korean language. The research partners were informed before the interview about confidentiality and the nature of the study (see Informed Consent in Appendix xx). All interviews were digitally recorded with the permission of the research partners and then later transcribed. Any transcriptions quoted in the dissertation were translated into English.

### Demographics

Fourteen Kirogi mothers involved in the study were recruited through snowball sampling and interviewed. The demographics of the sample were assessed into seven different categories. In terms of respondent age, five Kirogi mothers were in the ages of 40- 45 and nine in ages of 45-50. In sum, all respondents were between 40 and 50 years of age. Regarding respondent duration of stay, all have been in the US from 5 to 7 years.

In terms of respondent immigration status, five Kirogi mothers hold F-1 Vias. These mothers registered at an English language institution or applied to a community college and obtained a student visa to bring their children with them. Six of the research partners are permanent residents. Two research partners hold E-2 Visa that is treaty investor visa and one research partner holds visitor's visa. All of the husbands are dependent on their own financial resources for their Kirogi living arrangement. Of the fourteen husbands, five are self-employed, four are employees, three own their own businesses, and two are professors.

In terms of the ages of the research partners' firstborn children, most of their firstborns are between 15 and 20. Of the fourteen research partners, nine of them have firstborns and five of the respondents' firstborns are over 20 years old. In terms of the ages of the respondents' secondborn child, most of the secondborn children were between 15 and 20 years old. Nine secondborn children are between ten and fifteen years old and three are over 20 years old. Two research partners do not have a second child.

Regarding research partners' church denominations, most of the Kirogi mothers belong to a Presbyterian church. Two mothers belong to a Baptist church, one belongs to an independent congregation, and one belongs to a Pentecostal church.

### Data Analysis

Max Van Manen suggested that gathering material and analyzing this material is inseparable process yet gathering and reflecting on lived experience is two different process of research project. For phenomenological study, the researcher needs to keep the questions open to be involved in the substance of the question. After being transcribed, the interviews were analyzed by identifying common themes and interpreting patterns of



interaction in the stories. Data analysis is an opportunity to understand deeply what the participants have experienced and to refine their interpretations. More specifically, data analysis is a process by which one formally identifies themes and constructs ideas from the data; data analysis consists of the tasks of describing, classifying, and interpreting.<sup>305</sup>

### Coding

The first step was to read the interview transcriptions several times and to make a list of significant sentences that give ideas about how Kirogi mothers have experienced the phenomenon.<sup>306</sup> Next, coding or categorizing of the sentences was conducted. All of the data were entered into a NVivo 10 program,<sup>307</sup> a software program which is considered to be a highly efficient and reliable tool in qualitative analysis of data.<sup>308</sup> I began analyzing with the help of this computer software which facilitated data storage, coding, retrieval, comparing and linking. After open coding, I grouped codes into families of categories. These categories were combined into several themes again. These significant statements and themes became the source of written descriptions of Kirogi mothers' lived experience (textural description) and the context (structural description).<sup>309</sup> Finally, incorporating these two descriptions, the common experiences of the Kirogi mothers were described. This is the essence of the experience and the culmination of a phenomenological study.<sup>310</sup>

The data collected and analyzed through the phenomenological method were then hermeneutically analyzed through the lenses of feminist pastoral theological frameworks

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<sup>305</sup> Creswell, 151.

<sup>306</sup> Creswell, 61.

<sup>307</sup> NVivo 10, Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) Computer Software, QSR International, 2012.

<sup>308</sup> P. Bazeley, *Qualitative Data Analysis with NVivo* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2007), 5.

<sup>309</sup> Creswell, 151.

<sup>310</sup> Creswell, 159.

and Relational-Cultural Theory. I constructed a mutually critical correlation between the Christian Kirogi mothers' experiences and feminist theology and between their experiences and Christian tradition through the lens of relational cultural theory. Through examining the data, practical theology provided a way to understand and to evaluate the current situation of Kirogi mothers and the practices of the church.

### Saturation

I conducted fourteen interviews. The fourteenth interview indicated “theoretical saturation” and revealed very few new findings. In an attempt to demonstrate saturation, after completing the twelve interviews, all data were reanalyzed utilizing the final set of codes. In the thirteenth interview, the percentage of new codes added was 2.5%. I then conducted a fourteenth interview to determine if significant new codes and concepts would emerge. The interview with the fourteenth research partner generated only two new codes out of a total of 280 codes (0.7%), thus indicating data saturation.

### Trustworthiness

The nature of credibility in qualitative studies is different from that in quantitative studies. Lincoln and Guba contrasted the philosophical underpinnings of each approach. While quantitative research attempts to ensure credibility by establishing external and internal validity, reliability, and objectivity that reflect a more traditional and empirically-based science, qualitative research is subjectively-based human science approach.<sup>311</sup> Qualitative study seeks different knowledge claims to establish “‘credibility’, ‘transferability,’ ‘dependability’ and ‘confirmability.’”<sup>312</sup> According to Lincoln and

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<sup>311</sup> Yvonna S. Lincoln and G. Guba Egon, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1985), 300.

<sup>312</sup> Lincoln and Guba, 301.

Guba, credibility refers to the truthfulness of the findings while confirmability refers to the degree of bias in the results. There has been much debate as to how to consider validity and reliability in qualitative research. Therefore, there is no consensus about criteria for validity, trustworthiness, and rigor in qualitative research.<sup>313</sup> Since qualitative research is to view various ways of reality, it is not expected that all researcher would arrive at the same themes and categories.<sup>314</sup>

Because, understanding the data through my own experience, I am not able to bracket out the world, the phenomenological findings in this study are not neutral or value-free. Therefore, credibility is increased when researchers describe and interpret maintaining self-awareness during the research process.<sup>315</sup> Self-reflection helped me to provide a more accurate interpretation of the findings and increase the credibility. In relation to this, I described my personal location and interests in what and why I aimed to investigate in the chapter of introduction. I also write a memo in the paper and in the NVivo program to document my ideas and reflections because one of the ways of enhancing self-awareness is “to keep a journal in which the content and the process of interactions are noted including reactions to various events.”<sup>316</sup> Memo is also important data in this study. The memos including my insights, hunches, and reflections were dated so that they were later used to analyze data. For dependability, I used an audit trail that consisted of tape recordings and memos. An audit trail illustrates how researchers arrive at their results. Benner explains that an audit trail is “how data were collected, how

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<sup>313</sup> Gary Rolfe, “Validity, Trustworthiness and Rigour: Quality and the Idea of Qualitative Research,” *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 53, no. 3 (2006): 304.

<sup>314</sup> Rolfe, 305.

<sup>315</sup> Tina Koch, “Establishing Rigour in Qualitative Research: The Decision Trail,” *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 19, no. 5 (May 1994), 977.

<sup>316</sup> Koch, 977.

categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry.”<sup>317</sup> I incorporated my decision trail about my theoretical and methodological choices into my final project. According to Benner, the task of the researcher is “to uncover the meanings in such a way that they are not destroyed, distorted, decontextualized, trivialized, or sentimentalized and that the participants can recognize and validate the interpretation.”<sup>318</sup> Therefore, throughout the process, I tried to minimize bias and kept reminding myself not to distort meanings so that the participants would find resonance with my final themes and interpretations.

Another way of increasing trustworthiness is triangulation. I used digital recordings of the interviews, observations, and memo writings. Providing rich, thick description is a major strategy to ensure credibility of the research.<sup>319</sup> My analysis was based on thick descriptions of the Korean Kirogi mothers’ experiences. I selected several quotations for each category to provide readers with vivid examples of these categories. Direct quotations of the interviewees’ statements provide a safeguard against misrepresentation, so it was crucial to ensure that Korean interviews were translated into English well. Therefore, for the translations, two consultants, native English speakers, checked if those interviews were adequately translated into English.

### Hermeneutical Frameworks

Feminist pastoral theology and relational cultural theory (RCT) are utilized as the hermeneutical methods for this study. These feminist perspectives enable us to be aware

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<sup>317</sup> Sharan B. Merriam & Associates. *Qualitative Research in Practice: Examples for Discussion and Analysis* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 28.

<sup>318</sup> Patricia Benner, “Quality of Life: A Phenomenological Perspective on Explanation, Prediction, and Understanding in Nursing Science,” *Advances in Nursing Science* 8, no. 1 (Oct 1985), 6.

<sup>319</sup> Merriam & Associates, 29.

of the effects of patriarchal culture and to consider them in relation to Korean Christian Kirogi mothers' lives. In this section, the Korean Christian Kirogi mothers' sociocultural values are analyzed from the psychological perspective of relational cultural theory in terms of connection and disconnection, mutuality, authenticity, and vulnerability. Relational theory stresses relationship and connection rather than separateness and autonomy.

### Feminist Practical Theology

Feminist practical theological perspectives are used as a framework for analyzing the experiences of Korean Kirogi mothers in critical conversation with cultural dimensions and findings from empirical data. As indicated earlier, this dissertation uses a poststructural feminist perspective aiming to have a transformative dialogue with Korean Christian Kirogi mothers' lived experiences. To use a feminist hermeneutic means to deal with women's stories. Elaine Graham elucidates that, since the 1980s, pastoral care has come to pay attention to women's invisibility and to articulate a theology of women's experience.<sup>320</sup> She states that women's experience is considered as socially constructed, embodied, relational and psychosexual. For feminist theology, women's experience is primary and authoritative.<sup>321</sup> Doebling considers the ways in which patriarchy affects women's physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being.<sup>322</sup> Women have been oppressed just because they are female. Feminist perspectives reveal the impact of patriarchy on various cultures and traditions and correct how women see themselves and

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<sup>320</sup> Elaine L. Graham, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 124-125.

<sup>321</sup> Graham, 174.

<sup>322</sup> Carrie Doebling, "Developing Models of Feminist Pastoral Counseling," *Journal of Pastoral Care* 46, no. 1 (spring 1992): 24.

their experiences. For Doebling, feminist perspectives have permeated American culture, society, and religious communities in which not only women but men experience oppression. To be feminist means “to be perpetually aware of marginality.”<sup>323</sup> Early feminist works focused on the deconstruction of the patriarchal order. Pastoral care gradually began to concern itself with women’s invisibility and silence and began listening to their stories.

Miller-McLemore illustrates that the movement of feminism shifted from humanist to gynocentric feminism in the late twentieth century.<sup>324</sup> Humanist feminists pointed out the view of women as inherently inferior to men and pursued individual self-sufficiency and personal fulfillment. However, women began to recognize that they pursued male-defined ideals that led to the repression of the body and relationality and to power over others. Then, gynocentric feminism arose and attempted more fundamental changes in views of gender, sexual differences, and power in Western thought. They asked for political action to liberate women not only from gender-based oppression but from all social oppressions. As a result, feminist studies have challenged patriarchal traditions and included women’s studies and various other disciplines.<sup>325</sup>

Miller-McLemore addresses gender injustice and attempts to present how to value the place and voice of women in pastoral theology.<sup>326</sup> She challenges the imbalance of power and the social construction of gender in which women have been disadvantaged, and she suggests the reconstruction of operative religious ideas that support this social

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<sup>323</sup> Gail Griffin, *Calling: Essays on Teaching in the Mother Tongue* (Pasadena, CA: Trilogy Press, 1992), 26.

<sup>324</sup> Miller-McLemore, *Feminist Theory in Pastoral Theology*, 82-84.

<sup>325</sup> Miller-McLemore, *Feminist Theory in Pastoral Theology*, 82-84.

<sup>326</sup> Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, “How Sexuality and Relationships have Revolutionized Pastoral Theology,” 233-243.

construction. She believes that gender roles can be changed because sexuality is socially constructed. One-half of the population should not be ignored when considering the whole picture in psychology, theology, or medicine. Therefore, Miller-McLemore suggests that practical and pastoral theologians develop current feminist approaches aimed at transforming discrimination and gender stereotypes that result in systems of domination within religious life. Finally, instead of conventional modes of pastoral care, she proposes new modes of resisting, empowering, nurturing, and liberating. These modes are related to the cry for justice.

In recent decades, pastoral theology has shifted from the pastoral clinical paradigm to communal, contextual, and intercultural paradigms and regards relational justice as the normative value for pastoral care, counseling, and theology.<sup>327</sup> Patton observes that this “communal contextual paradigm” focuses on communities rather than individuals.<sup>328</sup> As mentioned earlier, in the 1940s, pastoral theology began heavily depending on psychological studies focused on the interpersonal and existential experiences of the ones receiving care for pastoral reflection and analysis.<sup>329</sup> As mentioned earlier, in the 1940s, pastoral theology began heavily depending on psychological studies focused on the interpersonal and existential experiences of the ones receiving care for pastoral reflection and analysis.<sup>330</sup> Over the past 50 years, the fields of psychology and therapeutic knowledge that are related to the study of human persons

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<sup>327</sup> Nancy J. Ramsay, “A Time of Ferment and Redefinition,” in *Pastoral Care and Counseling: Redefining the Paradigms*, ed. Nancy J. Ramsay (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 15.

<sup>328</sup> Rodney J. Hunter and John Patton, “The Therapeutic Tradition’s Theological and Ethical Commitments Viewed through Its Pedagogical Practices: A Tradition In Transition,” in *Pastoral Care and Social Conflicts*, ed. Pamela D. Couture and Rodney J. Hunter (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 36.

<sup>329</sup> Ramsay, “A Time of Ferment and Redefinition,” 15.

<sup>330</sup> Ramsay, “A Time of Ferment and Redefinition,” 15.

have significantly influenced practical and pastoral theology.<sup>331</sup> However, the scope of care has been expanded from the individual level to the communal level.

In explaining this change, Ramsay articulates that postmodernism has affected the construction of new paradigms in contemporary pastoral theology so that it now emphasizes social identity rather than self-identity, relationality rather than separate self-development and autonomy, multiple meanings of truth rather than objective truth, empirical experiments rather than assertions of a particular tradition in assessing justice, and inter-subjectivity rather than power in relationships.<sup>332</sup> In particular, the inclusion of relational justice signified liberation based on a disclosure of unequal power relations, and pastoral theology came to value interdependence and the ethical obligations of relationality. Love requires justice because of the complexity of interconnections. Thus, Ramsay illustrates that the prominent ethical criteria for pastoral theologians is mutuality.

This communal paradigm also influenced feminist practical theology. Miller-McLemore asserts the importance of interconnectedness, suggesting a new image of a “living human web” for pastoral care.<sup>333</sup> For traditional pastoral care, the metaphor was a living human document, but it emphasized self-sufficiency and individualism. Feminist pastoral theology values interdependence that fosters freedom yet maintains connections. Thus, differences need not be ignored but awareness of them may be heightened.<sup>334</sup> For

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<sup>331</sup> Reader, 6-7.

<sup>332</sup> Ramsay, “Contemporary Pastoral Theology: A Wider Vision for the Practice of Love,” in *Pastoral Care and Counseling: Redefining the Paradigms*, ed. Nancy J. Ramsay (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 160-166.

<sup>333</sup> Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, “The Living Human Web: Pastoral Theology at the Turn of the Century,” in *Through the Eyes of Women: Insights for Pastoral Care*, ed. Jeanne Stevenson Moessner (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 10-18.

<sup>334</sup> Marsha Foster Boyd and Carolyn Stahl Bohler, “Womanist-Feminist Alliances: Meeting on the Bridge,” in *Feminist and Womanist Pastoral Theology*, eds. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore and Brita L. Gill-Austern (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 194.



Miller-McLemore, the focus of feminist pastoral theology has to shift from individualistic learning to the alternative image of the living web. This does not mean the individual is less important but that the individual needs to be understood in a broader context. Miller-McLemore's metaphor focuses on the experiences of a person in connection with others, family, society, and ideologies. For her, psychology can be used to have a new understanding of connective selfhood, but by itself, this field cannot fully understand the living web; therefore, understanding of other social sciences, such as economics or political science, is necessary.

In this sense, Miller-McLemore contends that pastoral care includes congregational care in addition to religious and spiritual care for suffering individuals, and it involves both religious traditions and contemporary understandings of the human person from the social sciences. It is ultimately "the movement of God's love and hope in the lives of individuals and communities."<sup>335</sup> Larry K. Graham similarly states,

To fulfill the image of God in human relationships therefore is to be liberated from internalized bondage and to create a human environment characterized by a relational justice rather than oppressive structures of domination and subordination."<sup>336</sup>

Miller-McLemore illustrates, "Christianity has influenced feminism and womanism as much as the reverse."<sup>337</sup> She observes,

In the last two decades, feminist discussion has shifted from critical assessment of patriarchal tradition to inclusion of the history and knowledge of women and to new constructive projects in Scripture, ethics, and theology from a variety of perspectives."<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>335</sup> Miller-McLemore, "Feminist Theory in Pastoral Theology," 91.

<sup>336</sup> Larry K. Graham, *Care of Persons, Care of Worlds* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 25.

<sup>337</sup> Miller-McLemore, *Feminist Theory in Pastoral Theology*, 84.

<sup>338</sup> Miller-McLemore, *Feminist Theory in Pastoral Theology*, 84.

In relation to practical theology, feminism requires “prophetic and transformative challenge to systems of power within society and religious life.”<sup>339</sup> In feminist pastoral theological discussions, Christian traditions are crucial sources of empowerment in spite of their male-defined characteristics. Mentioning the creation of women in the image of God and their inherent worth, feminists focus on “egalitarian relationships of love, justice, and shared responsibility within families and society.”<sup>340</sup> The most common theme is radical mutuality based on religious and social understandings. Therefore, they claim that the doctrines of love, sexuality, and sin should be redefined.

Christie Cozad Neuger also sees relationality as a source of power for healing in pastoral care, and images of God fundamentally reflect the ability to be in relationship.<sup>341</sup> In other words, many images of God imply relationality. Thus, for Neuger, the empathic pastoral relationship provides deep healing care. She states that relationality is a core concept in feminist theory because relationality is a unique dimension of women’s lives. Many feminist psychologists illustrate that girls develop the capacity to orient themselves toward maintaining key relationships in their lives. Neuger argues that relationality has served as a tool for oppression and for empowerment at the same time. It is because of dualistic thinking that men are seen as more valuable and closer to God than women. Accordingly, women have been devalued in systems of hierarchical power relationships. Thus, feminist discussion originally criticized unjust relationships influenced by patriarchal and dualistic cultures.<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>339</sup> Miller-McLemore, “The Living Human Web,” 16.

<sup>340</sup> Miller-McLemore, *Feminist Theory in Pastoral Theology*, 85.

<sup>341</sup> Christie Cozad Neuger, “Women and Relationality,” in Miller-McLemore and Gill-Austern, 116-118.

<sup>342</sup> Neuger, 116-118.

Neuger asserts that these relationships continue to be analyzed, deconstructed, and reinvented in mutually enhancing ways.<sup>343</sup> Otherwise, women and other marginalized groups will continue to be excluded from the meaning-making processes of culture. Therefore, the criteria for feminist theory and theology need to be built through the lenses of power and ethics. Likewise, according to Neuger, feminist theology has offered an analysis of relational hierarchies and issues of justice, and feminist pastoral perspectives restructure the ethical foundation by examining the role of power in relationships. According to feminist theologian Carter Heyward, "Power dynamics which overpower instead of empower are considered unethical."<sup>344</sup> Power should be used not only to influence but also to be influenced.<sup>345</sup> In sum, Neuger suggests three foci that are key dimensions of feminist pastoral theology: (1) women's relationality as uniquely gendered; (2) the just and mutually enhancing ordering of relationships; and (3) theological understandings of relationship in the web of creation.<sup>346</sup>

Women's identities differ according to their contexts. Thus, to help women be empowered in mutual enhancing relationships, an analysis of power in relationships and an evaluation of mutuality and justice in relationships should be conducted.<sup>347</sup> Neuger argues that appropriate cultural analysis of patriarchy is necessary because, when women's relationality is socialized in patriarchal cultures, their self-development and identification of voice is deterred. Doehring concludes that the goals of pastoral

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<sup>343</sup> Neuger, 118.

<sup>344</sup> Isabel Carter Heyward, "Redefining Power," in *Our Passion for Justice: Images of Power, Sexuality and Liberation* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1984), 116-122.

<sup>345</sup> Boyd and Bohler, "Womanist-Feminist Alliances, 194.

<sup>346</sup> Neuger, "Women and Relationality," 118-121.

<sup>347</sup> Neuger, "Women and Relationality," 131.

counseling should be empowerment and liberation.<sup>348</sup> For her, empowerment occurs within relationships where people are interconnected in a relational web that makes possible self-assertion and mutual recognition.<sup>349</sup>

Kathleen Greider claims that aggression is fundamental to relationality.<sup>350</sup> She integrates many diverse insights into the development of a concept of healthy aggressiveness. The original meaning of “aggression” is “to go forward, to approach.” Greider defines aggression as a drive to survive and thrive and states that it can take emotional, cognitive, or physical forms. It has different meanings according to context. The expression of aggression fosters self-expression, connection with others, and defense against threat. Greider argues that due to its characteristics of deep ambivalence and complexity, it is considered negatively. As a result, aggression is usually denied and repressed to unconsciousness. However, in feminist and depth psychology, ambiguity, complexity, and conflict are highly prized. Greider does not conceive that aggression is a destructive instinct, rather, it is an expression of power of the life force.<sup>351</sup> She contends that the fusion of love and aggression becomes a source of humans’ capacity to do justice, thus, women’s aggression should not be ignored, mocked, or violently punished. It is disempowering and unethical when women’s aggression is silenced.<sup>352</sup> Greider suggests

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<sup>348</sup> Doebling, “Developing Models,” 23.

<sup>349</sup> Carrie Doebling, *Taking Care: Monitoring Power Dynamics and Relational Boundaries in Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 77.

<sup>350</sup> Kathleen J. Greider, ““Too Militant?” Aggression, Gender, and the Construction of Justice” in *Through Eyes of Women: Insights for Pastoral Care*, ed. Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 123-125.

<sup>351</sup> Greider, 123-125.

<sup>352</sup> Greider, 126-130

that women can strive for mutuality in aggressiveness, which moves people in relationship and signifies relational health.<sup>353</sup>

Moessner argues that authentic self-sacrifice should be at the center of the Christian gospel. For her, the danger is that women often confuse love of self with the individualism that is a goal of modern therapy. Using self-in-relation theory, Moessner regards women as connected selves, not isolated selves. Moessner discusses how to help women perceive themselves as loved selves, because “genuine love of self is pivotal to pastoral care with women.” She suggests that women imagine themselves as a self-in-relation to God. In this context, women should raise the question of who their neighbor is, and when they receive compassion from their neighbor, they should love themselves as well as love their neighbor.<sup>354</sup>

Miller-McLemore further proposes new visions of work and family. If we ignore these domains of women’s lives, they will continue to promote gender inequality. Therefore, she suggests a change of household roles for mutuality. As a mother, she feels resentment due to the lack of power in a male-defined work force, and she is aware of the low status of mothers and children.<sup>355</sup> She also asserts that the church does not provide nourishment to women. For her, churches should play a role of assigning value to mothering.<sup>356</sup> Churches can help people be good enough mothers, good enough families, and good enough communities. Pointing to the idea of the obsessive mothers’ sacrifice that has been projected onto mothers, Miller-McLemore claims that most children do not

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<sup>353</sup> Greider, 131-139.

<sup>354</sup> Glaz and Moessner, 206-211.

<sup>355</sup> Bonnie Miller-McLemore, *Also a Mother: Work and Family as Theological Dilemma* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 120-125.

<sup>356</sup> Miller-McLemore, *Also a Mother*, 130-168.

require unconditional self-sacrificial love. It is a privilege to care for children who are God's gifts and promises, not only for their parents, but for the larger community. Therefore, for her, the responsibility is equally on the larger community because children are our future.<sup>357</sup>

Such theories may not be sufficient when applied to the Korean context because they are written based on the experiences of white, middle-class American women. Ways of perceiving are different between Western and Korean societies.

### Relational Cultural Theory

The psychological model of relational-cultural theory (RCT) fits well with a feminist pastoral theological perspective because it treats seriously the unconscious dimensions of patriarchy, and patriarchy has led to the violation of the sacred. In defining feminist pastoral theology, a feminist model of psychology can be helpful for the empowerment and liberation of women. I also consider how Korean Kirogi mothers' concrete experiences can bring insights to RCT. One of the obstacles to relational competence is oppression by dominant groups who show non-responsiveness. Thus, Jordan urges us to focus on not only increasing girls' skills for connection, but also changing systems in which they lose their voices. Power differentials in relationships cause disconnection. In this dissertation, I attempt the transformation of pastoral care using psychology from feminist perspectives.

Bons-Storm argues that when pastoral counselors apply psychological theories to women, it is hard for women to tell stories, because the hidden assumptions are against

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<sup>357</sup> Miller-McLemore, *Also a Mother*, 130-168.

their experiences.<sup>358</sup> Therefore, Bons-Storm asserts that pastoral counselors need to discern what femininity means, how normal women develop, and the significance of the role of empathy in relatedness and interdependence. In this sense, relational cultural theory fits to understand women's experience.

Relational-cultural psychotherapy reexamines women's relationality. Relational psychologists have challenged the traditional notion of self and developed a new theory about women's sense of self, because the traditional notion of self-sufficiency does not seem to fit women's experiences.<sup>359</sup> RCT developed a new understanding of women's development from a relational perspective. An alternative view of self, a relational self, is distinguished from the traditional individuated self or autonomous self.<sup>360</sup> This traditional model is derived from the Freudian theory of ego and the pleasure principle. Judith Jordan criticizes not only Freud's model of drive but Kohut's self-psychology, because the concept of self in Kohut's theory is still ideally separate, in spite of emphasizing others.<sup>361</sup> Jordan claims that the traditional concept of self overemphasizes a separated self at the cost of connectedness and community. She suggests a "mutual forming process" of self, other, and the relationship so that the individual can achieve a greater goal than that of individual gratification.<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>358</sup> Riet Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman: Listening to Women's Silences in Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 94-112.

<sup>359</sup> Jean Baker Miller, *The Development of Women's Sense of Self* (Wellesley, MA: Wellesley College, Stone Center, 1984), 11-26.

<sup>360</sup> Miller, *The Development of Women's Sense of Self*, 11-12.

<sup>361</sup> Judith V. Jordan, "A Relational Perspective for Understanding Women's Development," in *Women's Growth in Diversity*, ed. Judith V. Jordan (New York: Guilford Press, 1997), 9-12.

<sup>362</sup> Judith V. Jordan, "Do You Believe that Concepts of Self and Autonomy are Useful in Understanding Women?" in *Women's Growth in Diversity*, ed. Jordan, 29-32.

For Jean Baker Miller, “being-in-relationship” is the beginning of a sense of self.<sup>363</sup> Being-in-relationship is an emotional experience. The traditional concept of self has ignored the interaction that entails attending to and responding to the other. For relational-cultural therapists, the self grows within emotional connections, not through separation. Girls build their sense of self-esteem through feeling that they are part of relationships and are taking care of those relationships. Miller argues that women’s interest in relationships should not be treated as dependency. The traditional concept of self follows “a quest for power over others” and gives women inferior value.<sup>364</sup> It deters woman’s growth and empowerment. The beginning of a sense of self is not separate but inseparable from dynamic interactions.<sup>365</sup>

For relational-cultural psychologists, the dynamic of the early mother-child relationship determines the development of the core relational self. Janet Surrey asserts that a girl’s ongoing interest and emotional desire is to be connected to her mother.<sup>366</sup> For her, the mother and daughter’s open relationship with each other is the beginning stage for the development of a self-in-relation. Through their mutually empathic process, mutual self-esteem is developed. Surrey conceives that self-esteem is formed through emotional sharing, openness, and a shared sense of understanding. Further, she contends that validation of difference develops empathy. However, sometimes daughters become overprotective or over-involved in feeling in difficult situations.<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>363</sup> Miller, *The Development of Women’s Sense of Self*, 1-26.

<sup>364</sup> Miller, *The Development of Women’s Sense of Self*, 25.

<sup>365</sup> Miller, 1-26.

<sup>366</sup> Janet L. Surrey, “The Self-in-Relation: A Theory of Women’s Development,” in *Women’s Growth in Connection*, ed. Judith V. Jordan, Alexandra G. Kaplan, Jean Baker Miller, Irene P. Stiver, and Janet L. Surrey (New York: Guilford Press, 1991), 61-66.

<sup>367</sup> Surrey, 61-66.



Alexandra Kaplan explains that the relational model sees conflict as a way of reaching connection.<sup>368</sup> For her, late adolescence is a crucial stage in the development of women's core relational self-structures as they attempt to resolve conflicts in their relationships with their parents. Those who try to resolve conflict in relationship with their mothers tend to have many friends, including boyfriends. However, those who are affectively disengaged from their parents have difficulty in moving toward intimate relationships with their friends.<sup>369</sup> Jordan believes that growth requires having the courage to bear conflict. For her, relational conflict allows us to give voice to our concerns and to honor to our experiences.<sup>370</sup>

Irene Stiver investigates the role of dependency between women and men in relationships.<sup>371</sup> She finds that mothers encourage their sons' aggressive behaviors according to their internalized cultural values, but show different attitudes toward their daughters. This leads to girls being helpless and dependent as a way of connecting with others and boys not learning how to have healthy interpersonal connections. For Stiver, dependency is a female style of relating, and "healthy dependency" provides a context for growth and development. Therefore, she suggests that women need to learn to value their needs and inner feelings, which is called self-empathy. In contrast, men need to learn to be more empathic and acknowledge their vulnerabilities.<sup>372</sup>

Jordan points out that women have difficulty developing self-empathy because

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<sup>368</sup> Alexandra G. Kaplan, Nancy Gleason, and Rona Klein, "Women's Self Development in Late Adolescence," in Jordan, Kaplan, et al., 122-140.

<sup>369</sup> Kaplan, Gleason and Klein, 122-140.

<sup>370</sup> Judith V. Jordan, *Courage in Connection: Conflict, Compassion, Creativity* (Wellesley, MA: Wellesley College, Stone Center, 1990), 45.

<sup>371</sup> Stiver, "The Meanings of Dependency in Female-Male Relationships," in Jordan, Kaplan, et al., 143-161.

<sup>372</sup> Stiver, 143-161.

they are attentive to others' needs first.<sup>373</sup> Males have difficulty being empathic, while women have difficulty reinstating a sense of self and cognitively structuring the life experience. Jordan believes that empathy is basic to human connection, and she focuses on mutual empathy. Mutuality creates an openness to allow for something new to happen. Children can learn mutual empathy when their parents allow them to acknowledge and express their feelings. They need resonance and response to experience their important feelings in their depths and complexity. Jordan argues that mutual empathy fosters the expression and satisfaction of sexual desire. In this context, real desire is not selfish but directs our connection. For her, people will attain wholeness when they openly explore the true nature of their desires in relationships.<sup>374</sup>

For Miller and Stiver, connection means "mutual empathy" and "mutual empowerment."<sup>375</sup> Mutual empathy leads to mutual empowerment. It consists of five good things: zest, action, knowledge, worth, and desire for more connection. However, they state that the imbalance of power between men and women does not provide either women or men with mutual empathy and empowerment.

Jordan examines the vulnerability, courage, and compassion that exist in deep and creative connections. She defines "vulnerability" as being "susceptible to receiving wounds or physical injury; open to attack," and she sees it as important for growth-promoting connection. When we are vulnerable, we are open to being influenced by others, and we become less defensive and willing to be less in control. However, it is not

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<sup>373</sup> Alexandra G. Kaplan, Judith V. Jordan, and Janet L. Surrey, *Women and Empathy: Implications for Psychological Development and Psychotherapy*, in Jordan, Kaplan, et al., 28-34.

<sup>374</sup> Kaplan, Jordan, and Surrey, "Women and Empathy," 28-34.

<sup>375</sup> Jean Baker Miller and Irene P. Stiver, *The Healing Connection: How Women Form Connections in Both Therapy and in Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 24-41.

easy to be vulnerable because of the cultural context, which idealizes power over others and competition. In this cultural context, it is not safe to be vulnerable and open to being influenced. Jordan indicates that boys learn to deny vulnerability, which generates helpless feelings. For males, the others' weakness can be an opportunity to be dominant, and vulnerability becomes a sign of danger. On the other hand, girls are emotionally more open to others and encouraged to be vulnerable. It evokes compassion in caregiving, but also creates the possibility of being exploited.<sup>376</sup> Jordan defines courage as the capacity to face vulnerability.

Jordan also addresses the relational model of competence.<sup>377</sup> Women have been regarded as having problems with competence and achievement. For Jordan, relationship competence means the ability to participate in growth-fostering relationships.<sup>378</sup> It includes emotional, cognitive, and behavioral elements. When we empower others, relational competence occurs. However, one of the obstacles to relational competence is oppression by dominant groups who show non-responsiveness.<sup>379</sup> In relation to it, Jordan urges us to focus on not only increasing girls' skills for connection, but also changing systems in which they lose their voices.

Miller and Stiver address the paradox of connection and disconnection.<sup>380</sup> They argue that although people are afraid of engaging with others, they still yearn for connection with others. This fear comes from their wanting to keep important parts of themselves out of connection, and this calls for strategies for disconnection. Jordan

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<sup>376</sup> Jordan, *Courage in Connection*, 45.

<sup>377</sup> Judith V. Jordan, "Toward Competence and Connection," in *The Complexity of Connection*, eds. Judith V. Jordan, Maureen Walker, and Linda M. Hartling (New York: Guilford Press, 2004), 11-27.

<sup>378</sup> Judith V. Jordan, "Toward Competence and Connection," 15.

<sup>379</sup> Judith V. Jordan, "Toward Competence and Connection," 16-27.

<sup>380</sup> Jean Baker Miller and Irene P. Stiver, *Movement in Therapy: Honoring the Strategies of Disconnection* (Wellesley, MA: Wellesley College, Stone Center, 1994), 1-13.

demonstrates that disconnection from others is a primary source of human suffering.<sup>381</sup>

According to her, racism has forced people to be isolated. In relationships, people repeat disconnection and reconnection at an unconscious level. In disconnection, people experience less energy and feel negative affect, fear, sadness, anger, or depression. When disconnection occurs, people blame themselves or others, but Jordan advises people to look at their relational patterns to find ways of connection. When people are hurt by others, they become angry at them, but they often just withdraw, seeking safety.

On the other hand, when they hurt others, they also close down, feeling ashamed to defend themselves.<sup>382</sup> Chronic disconnection entails extreme fear of relationships as well as an extreme yearning for connection. Jordan suggests healthy disconnection for proper self-protection and discernment of when it is safe to be open to others. Nonetheless, openness to being moved by others is essential to the transformation of disconnection. When one is open, one can find ways to get out of being stuck in disconnection; this is related to relational resilience. Therefore, the focus of transforming disconnection is dealing with fear.<sup>383</sup>

Power differentials in relationships cause disconnection. It is harder for the less powerful person to change the course of an interaction.<sup>384</sup> In RCT, power is regarded as the capacity to produce change. It is like energy for everyday living, not “power over”

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<sup>381</sup> Judith V. Jordan, “Relational Awareness: Transforming Disconnection,” in Jordan, Walker, and Hartling, 47-63.

<sup>382</sup> Jordan, “Relational Awareness,” 47-63.

<sup>383</sup> Jordan, “Relational Awareness,” 47-63.

<sup>384</sup> Maureen Walker, “How Relationships Heal,” in *How Connections Heal: Stories from Relational-Cultural Therapy*, eds. Maureen Walker and Wendy B. Rosen (New York: Guilford Press, 2004), 13-16.

others. Power can be the shared energy of relationship and facilitates the movement of energy.<sup>385</sup>

Miller contends that power should be used in the service of others.<sup>386</sup> She observes that when women have acted out of their own interests and motivation, it has been regarded as destructively aggressive. Therefore, many women remain underdeveloped. She argues that if only one sex uses their powers for others, an imbalance occurs in society. But when women try to use power, they become fearful, as if they are losing their core sense of identity. Women's using their self-determined power becomes troublesome, equated with selfishness, destructiveness, non-femininity, and abandonment.

RCT deals with "healthy psychological development (connection) and disruptions to this process (disconnections) that a woman has experienced."<sup>387</sup> Miller and Stiver contend that the most destructive feeling is psychological isolation.<sup>388</sup> They illustrate that in the extreme, isolation leads to hopelessness and despair. Repeated disconnections will lead people to create distorted relational images and to construct meanings of self-condemnation.

In understanding Korean Kirogi mothers' experiences, feminist practical theology and RCT will be a valuable method. Unlike other psychological theories, RCT is concerned with how culture influences relationships in general. Korean Kirogi mothers' relationships need to be examined not only from the perspective of individuals' experiences as influenced by patriarchy but also from the context of living in a foreign

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<sup>385</sup> Walker, "How Relationships Heal," 13-16

<sup>386</sup> Miller, "Women and Power," in Jordan, Keplan, et al., 197-205.

<sup>387</sup> Jackson and Greene, 62-63.

<sup>388</sup> Miller and Stiver, "The Healing Connection," 72-83.

country as guardians for their children, rather than as immigrants. This cultural dimension is an important part of their experience that cannot be overlooked, since it is their everyday context.

However, RCT manifests limits in being applied to Korean women's experiences. RCT claims that all growth occurs in connection and women growth-fostering relationship is created through mutual empathy and mutual empowerment. However, connection through mutual empathy is too much ideal for Korean women who are not accustomed to expressing their thoughts, feelings, and needs and values harmony in relationship. For growth and connection, mutual empathy may be overwhelming to Korean women. Moreover, relational cultural theory describes that growth occurs only in connection as one stage. Korean women might face frustration to reach connection and mutual empathy. Furthermore, RCT seems to consider women's development and growth occurs only through connection and mutual empathy. Being mindful of these limits, considering Kirogi mothers' alienation and emotional difficulties, relational cultural theory can be a helpful analytic tool in order to construct adequate practices of care for Korean Kirogi mothers.

Overall, considering Kirogi mothers' alienation and emotional difficulties, feminist pastoral theology and relational-cultural theory may be a helpful analytical tool in constructing adequate practices of care for Kirogi mothers.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

This chapter reports the findings of the research focusing specifically on Korean Kirogi mothers' adjustment. Data were collected through interviews with fourteen Korean Christian Kirogi mothers from ten different Korean Protestant immigrant churches and memos were recorded as data. The themes discussed in this section of the study were generated using hermeneutical phenomenology. The findings of the research are presented by theme and respective sub-theme. To illustrate each theme, representative quotes from the interviews are presented; quotes from the interviews are translated into English. Eight main themes emerged from the data analysis: *reasons for the decision to leave Korea, family dynamics, Kirogi mothering, facing challenges, factors supporting the maintenance of Kirogi life, constructing meaning, roles of the Korean immigrant church, and the mothers' theological views of family separation*. To protect confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for the research partners, and no identifying details were revealed.

#### Reasons for the Decision to Leave Korea

The first theme that emerged from the data was *reasons for the decision to leave Korea*. This theme was saturated in two attributing factors: *pursuing a better educational environment and escaping*.

#### Pursuing a Better Educational Environment

All of the research partners revealed that they came to the U.S. for their children's education. Twelve of the research partners stated that they actively pursued better educational opportunities for their children. For the Kirogi family, a better educational

environment is the primary reason for separating the family. Most of the reasons for leaving Korea are related to children's success in a globalized world and dissatisfaction with the Korean educational system. Of thirteen Kirogi mothers, only one mother reported that her children's education was not her primary reason for leaving Korea, but it was still a main factor in her decision. Participants wanted to provide a better educational environment for their children because of *dissatisfaction with the Korean educational system* and *societal pressure*. For some of them, it was *hard to separate from their children*, so they decided to stay with their children to support their educations. In addition, some of the research partners believed that this better educational environment would lead to *their children's success and future well-being*.

*Dissatisfaction with the Korean educational system.* Six research partners responded that their reason for taking on the Kirogi arrangement was dissatisfaction with the competitive Korean school system. Many Korean mothers are fighting an examination war in Korea. Hongmi reported that she suddenly decided to come to the United States because the Korean educational system does not nurture creativity, and she did not like her children suffering from morning until late at night with private lessons. In the case of Linda, her son really wanted to come to the United States, and at the same time, her husband disliked the conservative style of Korean education, so they sent their child to the U.S. Linda believes that her child wanted to leave Korea because studying is too stressful there, and he wanted relief from his mother's burdensome inquiries.

On the other hand, Karen made a decision to come because she was exhausted from supporting her children. She reported that she did research and collected information about good private lessons for her children just like other mother did.



However, she did not want to do this anymore after four months of difficulty doing this work. She was not even sure if it was beneficial for her children. Karen stated that Koreans are very competitive in getting jobs, so children have to work hard not to be left behind, not knowing what their potential is or what they really want. She also mentioned that she could not keep up with other mothers.

*Mothers need to know a lot of information in Korea. But it is only what is required to get to college, even though the real key is children's own path of study. South Koreans get in to college easily and then they are just busy preparing to get a job. It gets harder as lots of people in society compete for a limited number of jobs. It is difficult to achieve what they worked for, but they have no other choice but to continually pursue their goal.*

Pearl also stated that she hated having to do what others did. If she had not worked so hard, her children would have been excluded. Korean society makes mothers drive themselves hard. Pearl experienced anger and stress when her children did not reach the goals she expected. Therefore, she kept nagging her children, asking them how they had done so poorly.

*One thing I hated about Korea was, I had to push my kids to get additional education besides schoolwork, regardless of my will. Due to the atmosphere of the society, I felt like my kids were getting behind if I didn't. So I hated that feeling. It didn't mean my children were getting bad grades. My kids came along well with good grades, but living up to others' standard was difficult. . . In Korea, there is an explosion of anger. There was a limitation in reaching the goal for my kids. So I was so stressed. I kept on having conflicts with my kids because of this.*

Some parents of children who perform poorly in the competitive school system decide to send their children abroad, thinking this is the only solution for their future success. Juhee, Pearl, and Soeun stated that they sent their children to the U.S. because their children could not adapt academically to their schools in Korea. Soeun said that her daughter excelled in elementary school, but she became just an average student as soon as she entered junior high school. Therefore, she could not reject her daughter's request

to send her to the U.S. again to go to school. In the case of Juhee, her family had lived in the United States for her husband's studies and then returned to Korea. However, she found that her oldest daughter did not adjust well at school after entering first grade during the second semester of the Korean elementary school year. Soon she noticed her daughter going about with a gloomy face, and her relationship with her daughter became sour.

Pearl's case is unique. She was a Kirogi mother staying with her children in the U.S. for one year when her children were in the sixth and seventh grades. Upon returning to Korea, she and her children were not able to adjust to the competing educational information there, so she decided to return to the U.S. According to her,

*I came to the United States for my children to learn English. However, my mother-in-law insisted that we come back to Korea, so we went back. But I felt like I was running behind, and ever since then I wanted to come back to the United States. The kids weren't able to adapt, so I came back.*

*Societal pressure.* Some of the research partners responded that they simply came due to societal pressure. Since the announcement of Korea's 1997 globalization policy, studying abroad in an English-speaking country is very important to most Koreans. Research partners shared that they decided to come to the United States because it was a boon to study abroad in an English-speaking country, and it made them feel like they were behind if they did not provide this opportunity for their children. Pearl said,

*At that time, children's going to a foreign country was a boon. I lived in wealthy Gangnam, and one-third of my child's classmates left and came back. . . During that time, studying abroad at an early age was popular. English language skills were considered very important in my country. . . In Korean society, one cannot survive without being outstanding, as there is no middle. There is no option. Either a good college or no college. . . There is simply no middle.*

Bora stated that when her child was in the fourth and fifth grades, many students left for other countries to temporarily study English. It made Bora feel that her child was being

left behind. In the case of Christine, she first took her children to another Asian country to learn English, following other Kirogi mothers. However, she was not satisfied with her children's English pronunciation, so she decided to come to the U.S. with seven other mothers and their children. She stated that the reason why she dared to come to the U.S. was because she trusted one fellow mother who had become a U.S. citizen after immigrating from Korea.

*Hard to separate from their children.* Joyce sent her son abroad alone, but then she decided to join him because she could not stand the thought of him being without their family. She stated,

*Some people recommended that I send my kids to a boarding school, but others said differently. My husband strongly disagreed, too, since he was separated from his family in his early childhood. He disliked the idea of my kids eating with uneasiness and said we won't even be able to swallow food because of this concern.*

Linda also reported that she was troubled when she thought about sending her children alone to live in a cold climate. Although her son received an acceptance letter to attend a boarding school in Maine, she decided not to send him there. She believes that as a parent she is responsible for feeding her child spirituality and values, but she felt like she would be sending her son off forever if she sent him at that time. Soeun reported that she first sent her daughter to her oldest uncle's house in the United States, but when she visited her daughter, she discovered that her daughter was having a hard time living in that house. Therefore, she cried a lot returning home and decided to come to the U.S. a year later to support her daughter, although her husband and daughter objected. However, later the daughter was happy because her mother was staying with her. Likewise, many Kirogi mothers separate from their husbands putting their priority on caring their children and

hard to let them live alone.

*Children's success and future well-being.* Six research partners shared that their decision to engage in a Kirogi living arrangement was for the sake of their children's success and future well-being. They wish for their children to succeed in life, and their criteria of success are having a more balanced life, going to a great college, having a great job, and living well after a good marriage. For some of them, gaining English skills is also an important motivation for becoming a Kirogi family, at least at first. Christine believes that equipping her children with English abilities will contribute not only to her children's success but also to Korea's strength in a globalized world. She said,

*I didn't want to raise my kids like frogs in a little well while the world is becoming more globalized. . . From my perspective, I am giving a positive contribution to my country. Isn't it also important to raise my kids to be competent persons with broad minds to introduce Korea to others? How long are we going to live near-sighted?*

The one mother who had a different primary reason for coming to the U.S. did secondarily want to come in order to provide opportunities for her children's success.

### Escaping

While the primary reason for their decision was for their children's education, there were other reasons Kirogi mothers left Korea. Some of the research partners shared that they wanted to escape *from strained relationships with their husbands, from feeling helpless as a mother, and from expensive private education costs in Korea.*

*Escape from strained relationships with husbands.* Seven research partners responded that another reason for their decision to come to the U.S. was to escape from the conflictive relationship with their husbands. Choi identifies an interesting cause for becoming a Kirogi family. She points out: "When a couple reaches a crisis point of break

up, they can enter into a justified separation in the name of children's education." Bora also made a decision to come to the United States because of conflicts between her and her husband. She said,

*Frankly, I didn't have a good relationship with my husband. So I brought my kids because I didn't want to get a divorce . . . My husband and I have a different life pattern, and I just hated it. My husband said he did not have a problem but I did. So . . . and I get tired easily. I disliked my husband meeting people and drinking, so I worked and spent money. However, for ten years I didn't get much income. But then, as my business failed, having no money made me complain more to my husband. And my husband put so many restrictions on me. He came home late at night but hated me going out at night to meet friends.*

Thus, Bora decided to come to the U.S. escaping from the conflictive couple relationship because she did not want to get a divorce. However, her husband denied that they had problems and did not know why she left.

Lisa and Soeun reported that they had conflictive relationships with their husbands due to their in-law families. Lisa said,

*My husband was not a good father to my sons. He was not available to play with my kids or to hang around to take care of them. And there were no words of appreciation to me. Besides, my mother-in-law and I had conflicts so I thought about getting divorced. I was tired of it and about to explode, so I thought about suicide and also getting a divorce.*

Therefore, Lisa enjoys her life in the U.S. because of separating from not only her husband but her mother-in-law. Soeun also stated,

*Due to my husband's monetary damages caused by his family, I got weary and did not want to see my in-laws. My heart was closed to my husband. The marriage was not happy. So I came to the United States with the excuse of the kids, and I hope this period of time away can heal our relationship.*

Because of the conflicts with her husband, Soeun reportedly had a hard time and felt unhappy. According to her, even the sexual relationship with her husband was difficult. Soeun shared that unless her husband apologizes to her, it will be hard for her to save the relationship with her husband. Nowadays, however, she senses that he seems to realize

that he hurt her and to be afraid of being abandoned by her.

On the other hand, Christine and Linda reported that they did not have many problems with their husbands other than that their husbands are sports maniacs. Christine said,

*I was a housewife, and my husband was a typical working person. By the way, my husband was very enthusiastic about soccer every weekend so I was a weekend widow. I fought a lot for ten years because of this, but my thinking process has changed as I have accepted that this can only release his stress and we no longer fight.*

Linda also stated,

*My husband is a sports maniac. I called him a tennis patient since he was so passionate about it. However, our marital problem was that I hate sports and my husband wants to spend his leisure time working out. But I wanted to have more family time, so that was one of the problems we had. I gave up fighting. Our relationship wasn't so bad but I was discontent.*

In the case of Youee, she had a tense relationship with her husband because her husband went back to South Korea, leaving his family at his parents' house in another state in the U.S. Her husband said that he would come back after two years, but she did not believe him. Just before her husband left, Youee was angry and asked him to divorce her and go. She became angrier at him because he lied and did not keep his promise to come back.

*Escape from feeling helpless as a mother.* Korean mothers are responsible for their children's education, teaching them directly or providing them with private tutoring. Juhee and Karen reported that they decided to go abroad as a Kirogi family because they were frustrated with their teaching abilities and wanted to improve their children's learning. Juhee said,

*One day, my child didn't know an English word. I looked it up in the dictionary, but I faced my limitation of teaching my kid. I was discouraged to realize that I couldn't help my child's studies any longer.*

Karen stated,

*I was in charge of my children's education but it was so difficult for me, so I thought it would be better for me to bring them to the United States. In Korea, children are expected to do so much learning and even pre-learning, which means studying at a higher level in the many years ahead.*

When they are unable to manage their children's education well, Korean mothers become frustrated and feel helpless. Thus, these Kirogi mothers decided to go abroad for their children's learning instead of seeking out private tutoring.

*Escape from expensive private education costs.* Educational expenses, including private tutoring, are very high in Korea, and Korean mothers think their children would rather study in the U.S. than go through the rigors of extensive private education. They figure that studying abroad is more cost-effective than paying private educational expenses. Therefore, many Korean parents decide to leave Korea to go to English-speaking countries. Three research partners reported that they considered coming to the United States for this reason. Bora reported that she wanted to free herself from her husband's bad business situation and decided to come to the United States to save herself private education costs. Christine explained,

*I sent my kids to private school in Korea at first, but because of the expensive tuition and the bad English pronunciation, I decided to cancel it in the middle of a one-year commitment and sent my kids to the United States to study instead.*

Cindy also shared that she came to the United States because of the expense of after-school education. These cases show how Korean parents are spending money for their children's education and finding ways to provide them with the best educational environment.

### Family Dynamics

Family dynamics is the second theme that emerged from the findings. Since the primary reason for the Kirogi arrangement is children's education, the complicated

emotions of Kirogi families and the ambivalent interactions between family members are presented. Although Kirogi mothers appear to be single parents, some of them are in frequent contact with their husbands, so their families are not exactly like single-parent families. They are also different from immigrant mothers. During the interviews, the research partners shared how their family relationships were maintained or changed. Thus, this theme of family dynamics resulted and became saturated in three kinds of relationships: *tense relationships*, *positive relationships*, and *lack of intimacy*.

### Tense Relationships

The Kirogi family style of living often causes difficulties in relationships. When the husband and wife are living apart and the mother is trying to raise the children without the father present, maintaining healthy relationships can be difficult. Most of the research partners reported that they once had or currently have tense relationships with family members due to the Kirogi living arrangement. They have experienced *conflicts with children* and *marital conflicts*.

*Conflicts with children.* Eight research partners reported conflicts between parents and children. Fathers became distant from their children as the separation continued for more than four or five years. Because of the traditional patriarchal Korean father's mindset, there is a big cultural gap between Kirogi fathers and their children. Children's newly acquired cultural differences also caused them to face more conflicts. Christine said,

*There is a communication gap between the father and the children. When my husband comes to the United States he expects a patriarchal style of living as in Korea, but the kids do not respond that way. Even the younger son calls the older son by his name, instead of addressing him more respectfully in the traditional Korean way. Just like this, we face cultural differences. And ignorance of Korean*



*tradition makes my husband feel neglected. Even if I ask my kids to obey their father's guidance in an effort to smooth out such gap, when my husband feels disrespected by our kids, his voice goes up.*

Karen said,

*Yes, I have a conflict with my children, because they want me to keep boundaries and also respect their privacy. My children feel free to express themselves, but they hate answering my private questions. I just try asking once or twice and then decide to wait until they talk.*

Other Kirogi fathers want their children to be obedient and submissive, but children who are expressive because of American cultural influences are treated as resistant. Youee also found that when her children are expressive, her husband becomes upset. This is because Korean men who are accustomed to Confucian hierarchical relations feel that they are losing their rights. Korean parents generally tend to criticize their children as being disrespectful and failing to contribute to the harmony of the family. This might cause an increase of disconnection in Kirogi parent-child relationships.

Two research partners replied that they have no authority over their children. These two Kirogi mothers apparently ask their child to behave according to Korean cultural values, but the children do not like those values. The conflicting values between Americanized children and Kirogi mothers who have traditional values seem to contribute to tension in Kirogi families. Christine felt that she had no authority in her son's eyes, who seems to think he is fully grown up. According to her, her second child is calm, but her first child is very opinionated and thinks like an adult. When she talks, her son listens as if the neighbor lady is talking. Then, Christine feels disrespected. Joyce also stated that her child is going through puberty and has many complaints and makes judgmental statements. She referred to other mothers who have said, "silence is the key," so that is what she is reportedly practicing.

Youce stated,

*For me, my kids are becoming more disobedient. Their opinions are getting stronger, and unbelievably they have spoken heartbreaking words to me. They said, "Mom, what did you do for us?" and "Don't mind us and live your life." Some Kirogi mothers that I interviewed shared that they are having a hard time*

due to the absence of their children's father. As they observed, it is more difficult with an adolescent child, especially a son. The children of three interviewees demonstrated attitudes or behaviors that are typical characteristics of adolescence. Hongmi said,

*When my children face problems at school, I don't know what the cause is since they don't talk about it. Whatever the problem may be, even if it's a friendship problem or getting hurt by certain issues, I wish their father could be here to comfort them and listen to them. . . I feel sad taking care of my children by myself.*

Joyce reported that her son had recently become disobedient and he complains excessively. He hangs out with his friends a lot and hates attending church. She thinks it is because he is in an adolescent period and believes such behaviors are due to the absence of a father figure. Whenever she says she will tell his father about a situation, her son's response is that his father will totally understand him. Lisa also reported that it is hard for her to control her adolescent son, who takes his car out at night and sometimes comes home late. She said,

*There is an absence of a father role model. Even if the father lacks in taking on his role, there is a big difference between having and not having a dad around, because kids learn from what they see. That's why I'm having difficulties. My youngest son takes the car at night and comes home late, but I cannot control him. But still it's better than no mom.*

These Kirogi mothers face difficulties in their children's resistant behaviors, and they feel the effects of living apart from their husbands.

*Marital conflicts.* All of the Kirogi mothers reported that they have experienced marital conflicts during the separation time, whether it was short- or long-term. The reasons they reported are fear of reunion, wanting to be compensated by their spouses,

and different values.

Almost half of the Kirogi mothers that I interviewed reported their fear of reunion with their spouses. Since they have a limited time in the U.S., they are supposed to go back to Korea and reunite with their husbands. However, almost everyone regrets that no matter what the circumstance is, a couple should not live apart. They believed that once couples are separated, they get used to living alone. These Kirogi mothers stated that when their husbands visit, they feel uncomfortable. Juhee stated,

*Both of us have realized that we can feel more comfortable by living alone. Five years have passed, and yet I still like staying together with my husband, but if the separation lasts longer, I can possibly come to dislike my husband. . . it is a strange new man's scent whenever he comes home and I dislike it. Widower's smell... When I open his bag from Korea, it seems like I smell the scent of a strange migrant man. I don't like it. Even the kids say that their father's stuff stinks, so I started buying cologne as a gift. . . And when I give instructions, his patience runs out and he gets mad and asks me to stop.*

Hongmi also said,

*It's hard for a couple to readjust to each other after living alone for a while. I need to be concerned more about making side dishes. . . In the absence of my husband, I am the king of the house. I do things the way I plan, but when my husband comes, I have to follow his orders. Then I get stressed. I cannot even scream at my children... However, when I'm alone I become more conceited. I make final decisions as the head of the household, but I lose the position of headship when my husband comes here.*

Christine observed that she and her husband increasingly do not understand each other because of the cultural gap. As Sara Mietzner and Li-Wen Lin point out, understanding partners' experience and perspective is an important factor in maintaining long distant relationships; when couples share an understanding, they succeed.<sup>389</sup> However when some research partners talk, couples experience their thinking processes becoming different. That makes Kirogi mothers afraid, because it would be easy for them to not live

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<sup>389</sup> Sara Mietzner and Li-Wen Lin, "Would You Do It Again?: Relationship Skills Gained in a Long-Distance Relationship," *College Student Journal* 39, no. 1 (Mar 2005), 195.

together with their husbands. Thus, Joyce is pessimistic about a Kirogi couple's relationship at the beginning of the reunion time. She has learned that a couple should not separate for any reason, because then they become distant from one another.

Four of the research partners shared that they experience marital conflicts because both husband and wife want to be compensated by their partner for their struggles and suffering. Usually husbands want to show how they have had a hard time in Korea without their families and that they feel lonely. On the other hand, wives also want to be relieved of all their hard chores and want their husbands help them.

Joyce said,

*Both of us had desires to be compensated. When my husband came he wanted to receive 100 percent, and I also wanted to let go of my duties while he was here. However, my husband didn't know what to help with and how to help. When he did something, I told him it was wrong. . . we ended up continuously fighting over unnecessary things, and many times he went back without reconciliation.*

Therefore, couples feel tension when the husband visits his family in the U.S., and they become upset because their spouses do not satisfy their needs.

Four research partners reported conflicts with their husbands due to different values. Bora said that her husband used to force her to live according to traditional values. For example, her husband did not allow her to go out at night, while he came home late in Korea. He is a typical traditional patriarchal Korean husband.

On the other hand, Soeun said that one of the reasons for her conflicts with her husband is their differing levels of faith. According to her, she became a sincere Christian after coming to the U.S., but her husband seems to just be a Sunday Christian. She reported that these different faith values made her and her husband distant. Different values, cultural or religious, produce conflicts between husbands and wives in Kirogi families. Likewise, most research partners reported that they feel comfortable living

alone and feel strange when their husbands visit them.

### Positive Relationships

Despite several years of separation, some research partners shared that they maintain a strong family unity based on a more flexible form of family relations than the traditional patriarchal form. Ten Kirogi mothers reported improved relationships and trust with their husbands. For them, the long-distance relationship is likely to provide an opportunity to understand their partners better through learning how to relate to their partner through non-physical communication.<sup>390</sup> Thus, separation has created an opportunity for *improved marital relationships*. Another factor contributing to the maintenance of positive marital relationships is *trusting* their husbands. Regarding the parent-child relationship, some reported *closer relationships with their children* than before.

*Improved marital relationships.* In the case of marital relationships, research partners' relationships improved, mostly because couples felt sorry for each other. In this study, nine Kirogi mothers reported that they and their husbands feel sorry for each other, and this has improved their marital relationships. Cindy believes that God has separated her and her husband so they do not have to fight with each other and they can try to build each other up. Cindy feels sorry that she is not able to do housework for her husband. Homgmi and Jisoo also shared that they feel sorry for their husbands because they are lonely living in Korea.

Karen feels sorry because she is the one who separated her children from their father and she is not good enough to her husband. Juhee also said,

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<sup>390</sup> Mietzner and Lin, 196.

*Although he ate well and lived well alone, whenever he returned home to Korea, he felt lonely and didn't want to turn on the lights because it took a long time to warm up the room. So he hated it.*

Pearl shared,

*In the old days, we used to talk a lot and fought over the minor things, but now we try to understand each other more. When we are apart, it's wrong to hurt each other and leave behind wounds, because the wounds will only get bigger in our long distance relationship. . . So now, we apologize to each other more quickly.*

Soeun said,

*The more I think about it, for me, taking time off was a good thing for me, and it was the right choice I made. Because even our couple's issues of faults and pains, it was something we needed to point out to each other to fix our problem. It has changed to no problems, as we become more understanding of each other through our separation. Ever since I came here, my husband kindly asks me to come back whenever I am faced with heart troubles. Who else can say like this to me?*

In sum, because they feel sorry for each other, these Kirogi couples make efforts to understand and treat each other well. Wives usually feel sorry that they cannot take care of their husbands and feel responsible for making them feel lonely. They further feel guilty for separating their husbands and children. Feeling sorry for each other has improved these couples' relationships.

Four of the research partners shared that they have a lot more conversations with their spouses than they did when they were together in Korea. Their frequent conversations via phone, webcam, and group chatting has reportedly increased the amount of couple communication. Cindy said,

*My husband and I do video chat every day. In reality, living together doesn't necessarily mean spending time together and having long conversations. But through video chatting, we tend to have longer conversations, since we have to sit down and spend twenty to thirty minutes sharing our experiences. In fact, other people say that we actually have longer conversations now than when we lived together.*

Other Kirogi mothers also reported that the amount of conversation with their husbands

had increased after their separation.

One research partner, Linda, reported that she and her husband came to have a higher quality relationship after the beginning of their transnational living arrangement. She has more conversations and spends more time with her husband when he visits than before their separation. In long distant relationships, spending time together with one's partner has been seen as an important factor of continuation of the relationship.<sup>391</sup> Arditti and Kauffman maintains that long distant relationship couples do not take their partner for granted as other couples who see their spouse everyday do, and they develop a stronger connection through non-physical communication.<sup>392</sup> Because of the distance between them, their time together is viewed as more enjoyable. They are likely to talk more about a wider variety of topics using technology than geographically close couples.<sup>393</sup>

*Trusting marital relationships.* More than half of the Kirogi mothers reported that they trust their husbands, and this influences the marital relationship in a positive way. Guldner and Swenson argue that intimacy, trust, and commitment are important factors in sustaining long- distance relationships.<sup>394</sup> Likewise, the research partners in my study shared that the trusting relationship they have with their husbands has helped them maintain a positive relationship during their long periods of separation.

Jisoo reported that her husband drinks a lot but she still trusts him. She strongly

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<sup>391</sup> Gregory T. Guldner and Clifford H. Swensen, "Time Spent Together and Relationship Quality: Long-Distance Relationships as a Test Case," *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 12 (May 1995): 313.

<sup>392</sup> J. A. Arditti and M. Kauffman, "Staying Close When Apart: Intimacy and Meaning in Long-Distance Relationships," in *Points and Counterpoints: Controversial Relationships and Family Issues in the 21st Century*, ed. M. Coleman and L. Ganong (Los Angeles: Roxbury, 2003), 53.

<sup>393</sup> Mietzner and Lin, 193.

<sup>394</sup> Guldner and Swensen, 319.

believes that her husband is not a person who would cheat on her. Juhee shared that she and her husband have built trust with each other by talking about their sexual needs openly. Interestingly, Lisa said that she strongly believes that her husband would not look at other women because he is a sports maniac. In other words, he has no time to have an extramarital affair; therefore, Lisa can trust him to be faithful. In sum, their trust in their husbands seems to sustain these women's lives as Kirogi mothers in the United States. Among the respondents, Christine, Cindy, and Pearl reported that their trust came from their strong faith in God. Cindy said,

*My husband says it would be too difficult for him to support two households, so he doesn't want me to worry about him cheating on me. He comforted me by saying that if he was the kind of person to cheat he'd cheat even when I was there. I'm glad we have the faith to trust each other.*

*Close relationships with children.* One might assume that the relationship between Kirogi fathers and their children would be distant. However, more than half of the respondents said that the relationships between their husbands and their children became closer than before. Some fathers reportedly talked more with their children than before the separation. Bora said that she and her husband have had longer conversations with their children in the United States than in Korea. According to Hongmi, she and her husband maintain an intimate relationship with their children because their children love Korean culture, such as Korean songs and movies.

Jisoo revealed that the atmosphere at her house has improved because in Korea, her husband always came home late and was only able to see their children sleeping at night. However, whenever her husband visits the U.S., he tries to spend a lot of time with their children. Similarly, Joyce and Karen reported that their husbands spend most of



their time on visits to the U.S. playing with their children by taking them out to restaurants, golfing and traveling with them, and spending a lot of time talking to them. Therefore, their children long for their fathers' visits.

Pearl and Soeun shared that their husbands always try to support their children with warm and encouraging words. Pearl stated,

*I always do Skype, Kakaotalk, and voluntarily send pictures and contact their dad daily... There has been more conversation among them. When we were living together, they only greeted each other briefly, but now my kids are trying to have conversations with their dad and prepare something for Father's Day. . . Often my husband also tries to send good messages and words of encouragement since he cannot stay with them. . . Even if they make mistakes, he tries to understand them one hundred percent. . . According to my husband, I should use encouraging and thoughtful words to change our kids and should not impose anger... This is why my kids like him a lot. My kids say that their father will definitely go to heaven.*

Since the Kirogi arrangement was chosen for their children's education, some Kirogi fathers seem to be able to maintain stable relationships with their wives and children and endure well the difficulties of living alone.

#### Lack of Intimacy

Many scholars have studied the negative outcomes of long-distance relationships. One negative outcome is a lack or loss of intimacy. Because Kirogi families live apart, they have to try hard to maintain long-distant relationships. Most of the Kirogi mothers in my study said that they feel a lack of intimacy in their families because of a lack of time spent together whether their relationship improved or not.

*Lack of intimacy with spouse.* More than half of the research partners reported experiencing a lack of emotional connection with their husbands. A negative outcome of long- distant relationships can be lack of physical proximity when they need each other's

comfort and support emotionally and physically.<sup>395</sup> Christine feels that she is losing prime time in her married life because she feels a lack of intimacy with her husband. She said,

*I like it, but there is always a prime time for a couple's relationship, so we are losing that prime time in our married life. We have lost our couple's relationship. We regret the lack of benefit for our endurance and sacrifice.*

Joyce said that it is regrettable that she and her husband are losing common themes to share:

*Because of our long-distance relationship there aren't many common things to talk about. When my husband talks about happenings in Korea, I don't understand and it's not fun. . . And when I tell him about the American education system, he doesn't understand, since it's new to him. . .*

She further shared that she made a great attempt to not reduce how much they conversed. Lisa also reported a lack of emotional connection with her husband, although she recognized the value of her husband's role in providing for the practical needs of daily life. She said,

*My husband comes and spends his time in front of the computer and doing things he likes. He likes to always do something. He likes shopping... and he buys something, trying to make our living more comfortable here. But it doesn't help me. Instead I want him to spend quality time with kids and go through troubles by listening and talking to them instead. But he does things in his own way only and spends all night trying to do something for us. However, we don't appreciate him because that's not what we want. Everyone loves and does things their own way to love.*

Pearl shared that she is not satisfied with her husband's attitude toward her, since he shows a lot of affection to their children but not to her. Although he is emotional, he never expresses it and keeps silent when he gets upset. She seems to want emotional connection, but her husband seems to feel that things are okay because he supplies her with her practical necessities. Soeun stated that she is thankful for her sincere husband who sends money, but she feels emotionally distant from him. Whenever her husband

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<sup>395</sup> Lifestyles, "Can a Long-Distance Romance Work?" *Jet* 7 (Sep 1998), 13.

calls, she does not feel intimacy in his routine words, although he might have a lot of love deep inside. One day, she asked him to upgrade his words but no change happened. Youee also thinks that her marital relationship has begun drifting away. She never thought her relationship could change that way, but as hers and her husband's interests have changed, the relationship has come apart.

Four of the research partners reported that since they do not experience frequent sexual intimacy with their husbands, their sexual needs have been reduced. Accordingly, they reported that they feel less close to their spouses. One of them said that she usually does not feel any need for sex, so her husband is having a hard time with that. On the other hand, three of them said that their husbands did not show any sexual interest toward them, and this caused them to suspect that their husbands were engaged in extramarital affairs. This is consistent with the finding that long-distant relationship couples may worry more about their partners meeting someone new, with accompanying feelings of suspicion and mistrust. On this note, Joyce shared,

*Once in a while I ask my husband, "Now do you ever get excited when you see me? Look suspicious?" He hates it when I say it in such a manner. In the early days, and especially the first two to three years were really difficult. But after the fourth year, it was easier and during the daytime I was fine. . . My relationship with my kids was good, so we went traveling together, so I was able to give up my sexual desires. Occasionally, I did get worried and it was really hard to trust. It felt like hell here. I have prayed to God to give me a trusting mind with no doubts... I did a lot of praying about protection of myself.*

Soeun reported that there was no sexual intimacy in her marital relationship even before the separation. However, it is hard for her to endure her sexual needs, and she has come to understand why couples divorce because of sexual dissatisfaction. Youee reported that it is hard for her to control her sexual needs, but her husband does not respond anything about it. However, although she doubts her husband is having an affair,

it would be more upsetting to her if she knew such a thing was happening. Therefore, she said that even if her husband is having an affair, she hopes he does not let her know.

*Lack of intimacy with children.* Four of the research partners talked about a lack of intimate connections between fathers and their children. For them, this relationship pattern was the same in Korea, too. Cindy said that even though her husband visits their home in the U.S., he and their children do not have time together because the children are busy with schoolwork:

*Father and the kids go to church together, but there is no conversation in depth. When my husband comes, the kids are too busy with schoolwork, so it's just the two of us talking, eating, and going out to drive around.*

Juhee shared,

*If my husband and the kids were living together, they could have had a better relationship with one another. It's kind of sad. But my husband said it might not be any different here than there, since the kids would be busy taking private education while he is busy with company work.*

Linda and Lisa reported that their husbands are typical traditional father types. Their husbands show authoritarian attitudes toward their children. Lisa stated,

*It's hard to have a conversation. However, my children do not hate their father. Their relationship is not too bad, but they have a difficult time talking to him. It somewhat shows father's authority over my children, but they don't miss him or want to see him.*

The lack of intimate connection between Kirogi fathers and their children continues in the United States due to a lack of time together. However, while a father's busyness with work influenced the amount of time they had together in Korea, children's busy schedules in the United States affect the level of intimacy between fathers and their children in the Kirogi situation.

### Kirogi Mothering

Since this is a study of Kirogi mothers' adjustment, it is very important to see how

these mothers' roles are different or the same in comparison to when they lived in Korea. Although Kirogi families seem to continue the model of a traditional gender division of labor between the wife as nurturer and the husband as provider, most of the respondents also shared that they perform different mothering roles in the U.S. The following roles will be discussed: *educational manager, head of family, diminishing mother roles, and mediator.*

### Educational Manager

Most of the Kirogi mothers I interviewed consider educational management an important part of mothering. They respond that the most crucial thing for their children is academics. Hence, they believe their job is providing the best educational environment for their children and pushing them to study harder. Hongmi, Joyce, Lisa, and Soeun reported that their roles are to keep reminding their children of the purpose of coming to the U.S. and to be strict about getting them to study. Due to this approach, most of their children show resistant attitudes. Joyce said,

*I'm sacrificing myself here as well, so I say my children should do their best to achieve good grades. I tell them that we came here because they said they would do their best, or I shouldn't have come. Whenever I say this, they don't like it and tell me to stop.*

However, Cindy said that she had a hard time forcing her children to study at the beginning of the separate living arrangement, and she eventually became ill because of her dissatisfaction with her children's academic achievement.

Christine and Soeun reported that although their children are doing well in other areas, such as showing leadership and participating in a lot of activities, they only insist that their children get high grades in their academic studies. Christine said,

*My oldest kid is very active and talks a lot. In only three years here, he became*

*student body president at his school. He has strong opinions and likes to do many activities, but that caused him to get behind academically. So, I was getting tired, because this was not the reason why we came. . . Going to a good college was our goal; I came here to support him in going to college, not to build his leadership skills by becoming student president. So we were headed down different paths. According to my son, studying is not everything that's needed to be successful in life, and he even mentioned about his father not making it to a good college but still being successful. He asked me why I'm obsessed with his studies. However, I told my son that I wanted to give him more opportunities and chances to be successful by studying hard as a good student, and this is the only reason why we came here.*

Among the three mothers who sent their children to college, two of them said they felt they had achieved their goals and expectations as their children entered college.

Therefore, Karen said she plans to return to Korea when her second child enters college next year. Linda also reported her joy when her son received an acceptance letter from college. She stated,

*My son attended a two-year community college and this year he received an acceptance letter from UCLA, and USC. The day he received the letter, he came and thanked me for letting him come to the United States to study. So we hugged and cried together.*

On the other hand, Youee said that, although she tried hard to support her children, the outcome was not fruitful, and even her son wanted her to leave for Korea. She said,

*My oldest kid has not been good at studying and couldn't even get a low GPA in college. He decided to take a leave of absence again this term, even though the college only allows two leaves of absence. . . My kids say they appreciate the sacrifice I made during the past eight years, though.*

Since they worked hard in the role of educational manager for their children, these women are satisfied or dissatisfied according to the results attained or their children's achievements.

#### New Gender Role: Head of Family

Kirogi mothers' heavy burdens and new gender roles often cause problems. Since their husbands are far away, Kirogi mothers seem to have difficulty providing adequate

care for their children. Some of them feel frustrated at not being able to guide their children properly. On the other hand, some of the research partners reported their enjoyment of the role of head of family. Six research partners reported that they feel more responsibility because they are the head of the family, instead of their husbands who are in Korea. Joyce reported feeling a heavy responsibility as the head of her family. She stated,

*It is way more difficult here than in Korea. When we were living in Korea, my husband took care of many important things, and I just needed to send my kid to school... It was easy. However, while giving rides here is the easy part, I often think I am the sole guardian. . . it is such a big burden. What if something happens to my kid somewhere? It burdens me just to think that I have to take care of everything without having anywhere to ask for help in case of emergency. . . It makes me think that this is what guardian is, like the role of the head of household.*

Hongmi, Jisoo, and Juhee also reported that their workload in the U.S. is too much because they have to play the role of mother and the role of father at the same time. It is a double burden for them and puts a lot of pressure on them so that they feel like they have to be supermoms. Karen shared that she had to be finicky with her children because of her responsibilities. She said,

*I always say yes, no, right or wrong, because I have to be solely responsible and cannot afford to be emotional. I would love to understand 100% in my heart. . . As a mother, I am always judging, so they view me as a grumbler. Even my husband says I have become too talkative. I sought after God as I had to become the head of household and couldn't afford to make mistakes.*

She further stated that she sometimes goes too far in playing her role as a head of family. Pearl reported a similar situation and added that she controls her emotions too much and becomes judgmental because of her heavy responsibilities, which causes her children to resist her.

Likewise, these Kirogi mothers reported feeling more burdened due to the

responsibilities of being the head of a household in addition to a housekeeper while some reported their enjoyment.

### Diminishing Mother Roles

On the other hand, six Kirogi mothers reported that their roles as mothers have diminished since coming to the U.S. Two attributing factors to their diminishing roles are the *lack of ability to support their children's academic work* and *parentification of children*. They experience restrictions to their involvement in their children's school and other daily activities due to language and cultural barriers. This sometimes results in a reversal of roles with their children.

*Lack of ability to support their children's academic work.* Some Kirogi mothers believe that they have no ability to support their children in doing their school work, and they have to get help from their children. Four research partners reported feeling helpless about supporting their children's academic achievement. Bora and Pearl mentioned that because of their lack of English abilities, they are not able to help their children with their studies. For Pearl, it is hard for her not to support her children in many ways. She shared,

*The most difficult thing for me is not being lonely without my husband by side, but also my inability to fully communicate with my kids in English. It may be especially so because I live far away from a Korean community. As my kids learn American culture and rules, I should be able to support them with better understanding in English.*

While three of the research partners seemed sad because of their inability to help their children academically, Hongmi stated that she is happy because she does not need to take care of her children academically here in the U.S. According to her, she is satisfied with her children's self-management in many ways.



*Parentification of children.* On the other hand, three of the research partners reported that they disliked their children trying to take care of or help them in the U.S.

Pearl stated,

*When I ask my kids in English. . . I can't speak English well, even though I can speak to them in Korean fluently. They ask me why I can't speak English after living in the United States for many years.*

Since she cannot speak English well, she feels her role as a mother diminished and not respected by her children. Linda shared,

*I have to rely on my kids for everything as I have a difficult time communicating in English. In Korea, I completely prepared everything so my kids just needed to follow through, but I became a foolish mother here without being able to understand anything. I cannot seem to provide any information or help to my kids, so I basically tell them to take care of their own stuff. Even when we go somewhere, I just have to tell my kids to call or speak. It was a very difficult feeling, like there are less and less things that I can take care of myself.*

Bora stated,

*People tell my oldest son that in the absence of his father he needs to step up and act as the father and help his mother. So he acts as if he is an adult, as the mother now asks him for help on things and phone calls . . .*

Likewise, for some of them, the role of mother is diminished compared to it in Korea, and they sometimes become dependent on their children who adjust American culture faster than they do. (One of them enjoyed their diminished role of mother)

### Mediator

Two of the research partners informed me that they try to connect their children with their fathers. Karen stated that she has become a mediator between her husband and her children in order to reduce the gap between them. Lisa also conveys what her children need and how they are doing to her husband. She said, "My kids come to me whining for whatever they need, and then I tell their father about it. So I chat with my husband about

the kids all the time.” This is a continuation of the traditional mother role, in which mothers bridge the relationships between fathers and children to help them communicate.

### Facing Challenges

Kirogi mothers become like single mothers for a limited time, therefore, they face various kinds of challenges living in a foreign country. This theme resulted and saturated in six challenges: *unstable legal status, experiencing prejudice, lack of self-fulfillment, loneliness, financial difficulties, and adjusting to a new culture.*

#### Unstable Legal Status

Eleven of the Kirogi mothers I interviewed reported that their unstable legal resident status has made their lives in the U.S. challenging. Their immigrant status is only to provide their children the opportunity to study legally in the U.S. While temporary visa status makes Kirogi mothers have a lot of stress, legal resident status is very convenient for travelling between Korea and the U.S. and does not need to be renewed frequently. Among them, Jisoo, Karen, and Lisa reported that they came to the U.S. on a visitor’s visa. Since it expires after six months, Lisa and Karen had to go back and forth two to four times a year. It placed a lot of stress on them. Jisoo experienced relief after changing her visa to an E2 visa, which allowed her to stay until she began working here. Karen stated,

*It became difficult to re-enter the United States after going back and forth four times with a visitor’s visa. Airport officials thought I was staying here too long, therefore, I changed my visa to an E2, and then I changed it to a visitor’s visa again. In fact, I can even apply for a green card. My kid is a United States citizen and over 21. I don’t really need a green card, so I am traveling with a visitor’s visa.*

On the other hand, Cindy, Christine, Pearl, Rose, and Soeun came to the U.S. with an F1 student visa. All of them received an F1 visa for the purpose of having legal resident status for their children's education, not for their own studying. Christine, who majors in computer science at college, complained that after extending her F1 visa in the U.S., she did not leave for Korea for fear of not getting approval for her visa extension in Korea again. It made her feel confined and sad, because she was not even able to attend her sister's funeral in Korea. In the case of Pearl, she changed schools to extend the F1 visa she had obtained from a language school. She said,

*I first came with the visa from a language school in California, but soon I had to switch because of the high tuition. Now I am in an MBA program at a graduate school. I really don't like studying, but I am preparing ahead, thinking that it may help me get a green card. Also, it hurt my pride to just pay the tuition and not go to school, so I thought that it would be beneficial to get a degree, even if I go back to Korea.*

Pearl expects that she can use her degree in the future after returning to Korea. Cindy, Joyce, Rose, and Lisa also changed their schools from language schools to theological schools so they would not lose their F1 visas. They believed that it was God's guidance, and all are satisfied with their new study of theology. Lisa said,

*I enrolled in a seminary to get an F1 visa and maintain my legal status here... I probably wouldn't have gone to school if someone had asked me to at first.*

In the case of Joyce, she first enrolled in a music school to receive a master's degree in music, which was her major in college in Korea. After completing it, she applied to study theology in order to maintain her legal status and received an F1 visa again. She is currently applying for a green card. Joyce said,

*I should have gone a year later... But now I can't go in or out. I have a green card in process... I think it will get better if I can go in and out with a green card. It would be nice if I could do that even after my kid goes to college in five years.*

Linda shared,

*That's why I searched for the working of God whenever I faced a status problem. I think I was looking for His work for us.*

The research partners who hold a visitor's visa or an F1 visa experience vulnerability, because they worry about the expiration of their visas or being able to obtain extensions for their legal resident status in the United States. Thus, their unstable legal status is a challenge for Kirogi mothers.

### Experiencing Prejudice

Ten research partners reported experiencing social bias, mostly in Korean communities in the U.S. Primarily because of the influence of the media, people tend to see Kirogi mothers through prejudicial lenses. Christine reported that even before leaving Korea, people sought to persuade her not to go to the U.S. because they believed that a Kirogi mother would be easily tempted to be unfaithful to her husband. Pearl shared,

*In fact, having an affair is not a problem only for Kirogi mothers, as there are a lot more mothers other than Kirogi. But there is a tendency to view Kirogi mothers that way just because they are alone. I think much of the blame goes to the media. I believe the media intentionally exaggerates and focuses that way in order to create a stigma. The media usually exaggerates it with the example of just one or two cases.*

Rose reported what she experienced in her church:

*There were some people who got into arguments with Kirogi mothers about why they came here separately from their husbands, even if it was for the sake of the children. But then, they were just concerned after reading newspaper articles about Kirogi husbands having affairs in Korea and Kirogi wives having affairs here.*

Similarly, Christine shared,

*I heard, "She will surely cause a problem. Did she have an affair in Korea? Or is she divorced from her husband? Or does he have a second wife?" From a worldly*

*point of view . . . yes, there is a strange tension. A questioning that there might be some other reasons. A hunch that there has got to be something. What is so special about here that Kirogi mothers are so desperate for their children... The natives here don't understand the significance of English. But if I put myself in their shoes, I think I could be just like them. It is such a narrow-minded understanding about women living alone.*

Most of these research partners believe that these kinds of prejudices occur because they are living without their husbands, and people who blame Kirogi mothers do not understand the background of Kirogi phenomenon. Hongmi even experienced bias from her close friends living in the U.S. According to Hongmi, they do not seem to understand why her family lives separately, and it is even humiliating to Korea. Therefore, Christine reported that she is self-conscious about being viewed as a woman living apart from her husband.

On the other hand, Juhee experienced these prejudices indirectly on a website for Korean American women. She said,

*I heard that people talk negatively about Kirogi mothers on Korean missy websites. I cried over some comments there. The comments were so different than what I am thinking. "Kirogi mothers have lost their minds; Kirogi mothers have messed up their children's lives." . . . I did not understand why people think this way, despite the fact that it was a very hard decision to make for the wellbeing of my children and was made after much thought . . .*

Interestingly, Lisa found that Korean immigrants are slandering Kirogi mothers out of jealousy, because Kirogi mothers are relatively well off financially, while there are many Korean immigrants suffering financial hardships. Lisa believes that the negative attitudes toward Kirogi mothers are due to some Kirogi mothers who play golf and have affairs. In sum, among the ten research partners who talked about experiencing prejudice, some experienced prejudice directly, while the others experienced it indirectly through the internet or rumors.

### Lack of Self-Fulfillment

Six research partners spoke of not having any time to achieve something for themselves. Christine shared that she cannot afford to enjoy a culturally rich life as she did in Korea. She reported that she has gone to a concert only once a year since coming to the U.S., and this feels very limiting to her. Similarly, Hongmi lamented,

*I don't have a chance to taste American culture. I only live in the Korean community . . . My friends also... I only go to Korean restaurants, and even foreign restaurants have servers who speak Korean. I live like I'm in Korea. There is no chance for mothers to improve.*

Jisoo and Karen reported that the whole week goes by so fast taking care of their children that there is not even time for adequate sleep. Lisa shared that she sacrifices herself for her children:

*I am financially frugal and stingy, and I am not good at spending money for myself. I didn't even like spending money on my medicine. It is better to spend even a penny more for my kids instead of myself. However, it's getting better.*

The reason why these respondents are not able to gain self-achievement is that they sacrifice their time and energy to take care of their children in a foreign country without the daily assistance of their husbands. In addition, a lack of financial resources prevents them from doing some of the things they might like to do. Therefore, lack of self-achievement due to lack of time, energy, and finance to take care of children becomes challenging for them.

### Loneliness

Upon arriving in California, Kirogi mothers encounter a strange language and culture. They might find that they are not truly welcomed by the majority of native people and often feel marginalized. Five research partners responded that loneliness is the

one of the biggest challenges for them in the U.S. Some of them feel like outsiders to others in the U.S. Other research partners replied that they feel isolated even in the Korean community and in the Korean immigrant church. However, Linda stated that her loneliness disappeared after moving to a Korean community. Christine named her loneliness, “isolation as an outsider,” and Pearl and Youee named it “a wilderness.”

Christine stated,

*It is a different kind of loneliness than in Korea. I am always an outsider and foreigner here. I am not an outsider in Korea, you know. I try to be extra careful just because I am a Kirogi mother. Loneliness as an outsider . . .*

Linda reported that she experienced isolation:

*The most important thing was spending time all by myself without anybody around. So I had to cry out loud for an hour after sending my kids to school, then I was able to rest, sleep, and clean up.*

Pearl said,

*It's like a desert without anything, and what am I . . . I am like a troublemaker. I must ask for help and there are not many things that I can do by myself . . . So it's like a wilderness here. However, this wilderness became helpful for my spirituality. In fact, my life has never been this hard. The hardest thing was just to survive day to day.*

Youee likewise used the term wilderness to explain her loneliness:

*It was a wilderness here. There is no one. There was no one to talk my heart out without pretension. I just met church friends and talked, but still couldn't find anyone to have a heart-to-heart talk with.*

Juhee also cried a lot because of loneliness whenever she called her husband. Jisoo's case is unique. She becomes lonely because she tries to avoid those who keep violating her private life in the United States:

*I usually don't like going to meetings with people. So I always pray to our Father. Even though my husband has a lot of money . . . Father, it's so hard for me to handle what people do to me. I cry out to Father.*

This loneliness is a challenge for Kirogi mothers and is an important factor in their adjustment to life in the United States.

### Financial Difficulties

Five research partners shared that their current financial difficulties challenge them. Bora, Hongmi, and Rose experienced unexpected financial difficulties in the U.S. and are considering changing their plans. Bora and Christine are planning to go back to Korea soon due to financial challenges. Hongmi said,

*My husband's business has been going badly, and I didn't get to see him for about a year. I am finally going next week . . . I am so satisfied about our kids' education, but I think it was a mistake to come here in terms of business.*

Similarly, Christine shared that she had lost money for the expense of Kirogi life and had to sell a big house. She regrets this from a worldly point of view. Rose also shared her financial difficulties: "But the problem is that my husband's business went really bad, and two years have passed. After that, I managed it until now by working hard and getting support from my parents." Due to this financial difficulty, Rose has experienced conflict in her relationship with her husband. Youee reported a similar situation saying,

*I stumbled upon learning how to do haircuts. I already got a license during my earlier years in the U.S. It became financially difficult after coming to California, and I had to work in different hair salons just to make a living. Now I have no money left, and my husband cannot send me money, either.*

The financial situations of Kirogi mothers are an important factor in sustaining their lives in the United States; otherwise, it becomes a challenge for them to continue to stay here.

### Adjusting to a New Culture

Two research partners reported their hardships in adjusting to a new culture due to language barriers and cultural differences, although they live in Korean communities.



Jisoo said,

*It's ridiculous how much difficulty I have. It is so difficult living in a different country after age 40 . . . Dealing with finances is difficult, and oftentimes I feel foolish at the bank . . . Then it's not the money that matters, but it is so difficult even to ask someone for help. I was the one who helped others in Korea, but here I have to ask for help . . . And when they brag about the helping, it is humbling and also stressful.*

Similarly, Karen shared that it is hard for her to adjust to a new culture due to lack of information. Since all thirteen interviewees are living in Korean communities, the other eleven Kirogi mothers do not seem to have experienced hardships adjusting to the new culture of the United States. The factor of living in a Korean community will be discussed further in the next section.

#### Factors Supporting the Maintenance of Kirogi Life

This theme resulted and saturated in eight factors that contribute to the maintenance of the Kirogi living arrangement: *children's satisfaction, modern technology, husband's frequent visits and stability, Korean community, feeling freedom, independent and positive characters, support from acquaintances, and limited length of stay.*

#### Children's Satisfaction

All the mothers, except for one, reported that they are satisfied with their lives in the U.S. because their children are stable, enjoy their school lives, and have more fun in the U.S. compared to in Korea. This motivates Kirogi mothers to maintain their Kirogi lives in the U.S. Bora shared,

*My kids are not brilliant in their studies, but they are responsible enough to follow through with schoolwork by themselves. My son manages well to do homework without missing any . . . I am satisfied in that regard. When I tell them*

*we will go back to Korea, they say they will be ruined, knowing there would be a lot more studying to do there.*

Cindy also stated that it seems to be more emotionally comfortable and less stressful for her children studying here. Joyce reported,

*My kid loves it here and has many friends. From the sixth grade on in Korea, the only thing the kids would be able to do is study. With a stretch, maybe take piano lessons . . . But as soon as we moved here, my kid learned everything he wanted, like viola, drums, guitar . . . He is ambitious . . . It seemed to me this was where he belonged. In spite of separation from parents, he looked very happy here. He was in the school orchestra and had auditions. I was happy that he liked classical music. I felt like that was something that would never happen in Korea.*

Linda said that her kids love living in the United States and thank her for bringing them here. She was greatly moved when her son said these things. Youee stated that her kids have freedom here but are not loosely free. She likes that they do not get strictly disciplined but are able to seek self-realization. Rose said,

*I didn't expect much about her studies as my daughter started during the last semester in junior high school. But in high school, she caught up in one semester and started getting straight A's. She never realized that studying could be this fun. She said Korea and here are like night and day difference.*

Their children's satisfaction with life in the U.S. is the most important factor in Kirogi mothers' decisions to continue their lives in the U.S., because this is the major reason for their Kirogi living arrangements. However, one of the thirteen participants decided to go back to Korea due to dissatisfaction with her children's poor academic achievement.

### Modern Technology

Due to modern technology, such as email, instant messaging, phones, webcams, and videophones for group chatting, it is not difficult for Kirogi family members to communicate with each other. Nine interviewees implied that modern technology helps them sustain their lives in the U.S. during the family's separation. Cindy referred to

“modern conveniences.” Pearl said, “I do Skype with my husband almost every day, and I also communicate through Kakaotalk and send pictures.” Others also shared that their husbands contact either them or their children at least daily, in some cases several times a day, using modern technology. It helps maintain their family solidarity and sustains Kirogi mothers during this time of living apart.

#### Husband’s Frequent Visits and Stability

Bora, Cindy, Jisoo, Pearl, and Rose all reported that their husbands’ frequent visits to the U.S. are beneficial to their lives here. For them, living here is possible because their husbands have flexible jobs. Jisoo said, “We used to take turns going back and forth, but now my husband comes here. He spends about one-third of a year here. His work is flexible.” Pearl reported that her husband visits five times a year because he owns his own business.

Juhee and Linda shared that their husbands’ stable lives in Korea help them worry less while they are in the U.S. Juhee said,

*My husband worked in Korea trying to read my mind as I always pressed him to come home early. But now, he can work as much as he wants, meet people, and enjoy leisure time, so he feels like he is on vacation. He also acknowledges the negative side.*

Linda stated,

*My husband always plays tennis, so he just needs to wash up and go to bed. But these other husbands do not have anything else to do at night, so they meet drinking buddies. They need drinking buddies and women, but do not have fun in life other than merely making money.*

Since Kirogi families live apart, husbands’ frequent visits and stable lives in Korea help Kirogi mothers sustain their lives in the United States.

#### Korean Community

Eight research partners reported that living in a Korean community helped them adjust to the Kirogi living arrangement. Most of them stated that they feel comfortable living in California. Lisa said that she did not experience any cultural shock when she came here:

*This is California. All I heard after I came here was that this is like Korea. And I went to a Korean church, so I didn't feel much cultural shock.*

Linda, Lisa, Hongmi, and Bora mentioned that they like living in a Korean community because they do not need to use English there. Bora said, "There are Korean services everywhere, like Verizon [phone], gas, and electricity. So I didn't feel the need to speak English and therefore, it's not hard at all." Jisoo, Joyce, and Linda said that they are able to have social relationships in the Korean community, and it helps them not feel lonely. Rose had a different reason why she prefers living in a Korean community. She stated that she needed to make money, so she moved to Los Angeles because Korean people prefer L.A. to other areas.

### Feeling Freedom

Seven research partners reported their feelings of freedom. Long-distance couples tend to enjoy the simple life that enables them to have freedom. Mietzner and Lin also indicate that partners in long-distance relationship have space for themselves.<sup>396</sup> Bora stated that she enjoys her single life free from conflicts that come from different lifestyles between her and her husband. She shared,

*My husband is very consistent with time. We eat at set times when we are together here, but I am not like that. I like to eat when I want to eat, and sleep when I want to sleep. So it was really comfortable when he was not around, living by my own decisions.*

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<sup>396</sup> Mietzner and Lin, 196.

Others noted that they feel freedom from their relationships with their in-laws. They experienced great stress in their relations with their in-laws in Korea. These relationships are a complicated issue in Korean society. As explained in Chapter Two, Korean wives have strong obligations to their husbands' families, even though they do not live with them. For Hongmi,

*It was very hard for me to go to meet all the relatives at holidays. It is kind of lonely during the holidays here, but so comfortable. I just need to spend time with church families.*

Joyce also stated,

*I had a hard time living so close to my in-laws, and I always wished to live far from them. My father-in-law is the eldest son of the family, and there were a lot of gatherings—birthdays and memorial services—everyone gathered together. Then I came here and felt so free without much to do.*

Jisoo shared,

*It is all because I have a good wife syndrome and good daughter-in-law syndrome. Maybe because of it, I have tension headaches, and it is so comfortable here living apart from my in-laws.*

Lisa said,

*I like it here in the United States. Before coming as a Kirogi, I felt like, give me freedom or give me death all because of my mother-in-law. Of course I didn't express it. Now that I am here playing tennis with my son, I am just enjoying this fresh air.*

Pearl avowed that she enjoys her free time in the U.S. doing what she wants to do:

*I went to L.A. and watched a musical, so after a year, I freely drove around wherever I wanted to go somewhere.*

Cindy felt free from her busy life in Korea:

*South Korea is a busy country that takes away a lot of time because of the busyness. Here I want to spend time with God, and I am determined to start a new life.*

For these Kirogi mothers, transnational living provides them with more time and space, so they enjoy their freedom in the United States. They seem to feel free from Korean traditional women's roles and duties.

### Independent and Positive Characters

Six research partners who have independent and sociable characters are adjusting well to Kirogi living in the U.S. Karen said,

*I have a tendency not to rely on others. My church people told me to call anytime, but I just had fellowship without asking for help. Those are the things I needed to do myself anyway. That's how I got adjusted here a little faster.*

Cindy asserted, "It is my character to just ask whenever I need to, and I spoke some English, so it was not difficult getting adjusted here." Pearl explained,

*I do not enjoy just getting help, because I feel that I need to do things myself. Even though I couldn't speak English, I took the kids to afterschool without any help. I am very independent and don't like to be bothered by others. It doesn't mean that I cannot live with others, but I just don't like to be bothered in personal matters.*

Soeun stated,

*I like American culture. I speak English better than I thought. Although I'm not fluent, I can communicate in English. It's not even like I have to live like Americans. It also has a lot to do with my character. I am very positive. Rather than living a complicated life, it feels free here and really fun to meet Americans at school.*

Rose shared,

*My husband said he couldn't send any more money, so return to Korea, but I just couldn't go back with the kids like that. So, in spite of my husband's opposition, I found ways to make money and worked really hard.*

Rose did not follow her husband's order to come back to Korea due to his inability to financially support his family in the U.S. Instead, she chose to stay in the U.S. and support herself. Whether these women's characters are naturally independent and

proactive or not, their characters have influenced their abilities to adjust to life as Kirogi mothers in a foreign country.

### Support from Acquaintances

Most Kirogi mothers feel lonely in the beginning, but some interviewees shared that they do not feel much loneliness because their friends, family members, and other relatives are closely involved in their daily lives. Four of the research partners reported that it was easy sustaining their lives in this new place because of support from relatives and friends. Bora said that her mother and sisters immigrated before she came to the U.S., and they helped her a lot. Hongmi reported that her uncle came here at the same time as she did, and they lived together for one year to help her. Similarly, Pearl shared that her husband's business partner lives in the Los Angeles area and helped her sustain her life as a Kirogi mother. Therefore, support from Kirogi mothers' friends, family members, and other relatives help them adjust effectively.

### Limited Length of Stay

Two of the research partners reported that they are able to endure living apart from their husbands because they know it is for a limited time. Cindy said,

*I didn't think of it as a sacrifice. It's something I would surely do for my kids. After some time, a couple becomes empty-nesters anyway and lives together until death, so this time is never considered a sacrifice.*

Likewise, Linda shared,

*I thanked my husband and God as I moved to the United States, perhaps because it was just a commitment for a limited time . . . I thought it was going to be five to six years. Now it is almost time to go back, I consider it a very good experience and a happy life.*

Unlike immigrant family, most Kirogi family is supposed to stay for a limited time, some of them enjoy their life in the U.S., and it helps their adjustment to life in the U.S.

### Constructing Meaning

The theme of constructing meaning resulted and saturated in three factors: *spiritual growth, self-fulfillment, and perspective changes*. Kirogi mothers found new meaning from their families' spiritual growth, self-fulfillment, and perspective changes. Elliot Mishler points out "the meaning of events and experience is constantly reframed within the contexts of our current and ongoing lives."<sup>397</sup> Likewise, Kirogi mothers are constantly developing new understandings that connect closely with their current experiences in the U.S. In this study, most respondents presented changes in perspective.

### Spiritual Growth of the Family

For Kirogi mothers, religion is closely related to how they establish new lives and helps them in their search for meaning in a lonely and stressful place.<sup>398</sup> All thirteen research partners reported that they found meaning in their transnational living through their family members' spiritual growth, including their own, regardless of their success in achieving their goals.

*Kirogi mothers' growth in faith.* Most (eleven) of the research partners confessed improvement in their faith after coming to the U.S., and this became the source of meaning in their Kirogi arrangement. They reported that their relationships with God became deeper and closer. Bora shared,

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<sup>397</sup> Elliot Mishler, "Narrative and Identity: The Double Arrow of Time," in *Discourse and Identity*, ed. A. De Fina, D. Schiffrin, and M. Bamberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 36.

<sup>398</sup> Bo Yong Lee, "Rethinking Assimilation," 56.



*Even though it became more difficult financially for my family, I am satisfied that we are getting better spiritually. The foremost important thing is meeting God... The real blessing is the blessing of knowing God, so we tend to focus more that way.*

Some of them informed me that although they think they should not have come to the U.S., they placed their meaning on their relationship with God. Christine said,

*I agree. It's like we went asking for trouble. The only thing I gained was God. . . It all depends where I put my value, but from a worldly point of view I lost a lot and regret coming here.*

Hongmi testified,

*Perhaps, now is the most difficult time of my life, including financially. But it is a revival time both emotionally and spiritually. Through difficult times, I finally got to know God and realized how much He loves me. I was often let down and disappointed during difficult times, but He gave me the strength to stand up again... Even though I am satisfied because of my kids' education, I feel like it was a mistake to come here in terms of business. Through it all, we are very well off spiritually, so overall I do not regret it.*

Joyce shared,

*I realized that God himself is free and came to an understanding of what it means to be set free when living in the truth. I found out that it is a wrong kind of faith if I force myself to do things. I have been living a life of legalism, while God sees the center of my heart.*

Cindy confessed,

*Here I recovered my first love with God; I just love spending time with God. So even with the absence of my husband, I am just happy that God knows my heart and difficulties and touches me.*

Juhee avowed,

*As time goes by, I realize that God knew I wouldn't be able to train my kids spiritually in Korea and intentionally sent us to L.A. where I don't know anyone, so I would be trained in the environment that He prepared. He wanted us to know Him and guided us through the entire process. We are just thankful that our faith has grown.*

Linda testified,

*I thought a lot about how God loves me just as I am, even without saying anything. I also realized that God has a big picture for us and guides us through it. I saw God working through many of my life's hurdles. I saw God working for us.*

Lisa shared, "I don't have much. To the contrary, my faith has gotten deeper and broader through the Kirogi life. Truly God scooped me up with forklifts and put me here."

Pearl said,

*God may have sent me here to recover my spiritual life. God was like a mere decoration at the corner of my house. But as my relationship with him became deeper, I realized that He makes me cry as I get to know more about Him... Yes, America is also like a wilderness . . . God the Father is the one who sent me to this wilderness . . . I am like a troublemaker to people. I have to ask for help, as I don't have many things I can do myself... So here is like a wilderness. But the life in the wilderness actually helped me spiritually.*

In sum, most of the Korean Christian Kirogi mothers place their value on an improved relationship with God and consider it one of the most meaningful things in their Kirogi lives.

*Husband's growth in faith.* Four research partners asserted that the faith of their husbands improved during the Kirogi time, and it is meaningful. Bora said,

*I told you that my husband studied philosophy, and he confessed that he found the truth that he had been looking for since he was a sophomore in junior high school . . . As he says, there is nothing more important than that. The most important thing is meeting God.*

Joyce testified,

*My husband became an ordained deacon last year. He serves with the praise team and became a close friend with our pastor. Personally close.*

Lisa joyfully shared,

*The strange thing is that my husband and mother-in-law started going to church. My husband needed a recommendation to apply for a professor position at a biblical college here, and my mother-in-law was thankful for the church that provided the letter and started attending. My husband also started going to the*

*church because of his promise, so the entire family started going together. It's like playing a three-cushion billiards game.*

Youee said,

*My husband started having faith after coming to the United States. He was blessed a lot when he took something called the New Family Class. He even served when he went to Korea. I asked him why he was doing that, and he said he wants our kids to be well.*

Four of the Kirogi mothers presented joyful expressions regarding their husbands' growth in faith and evaluated this growth as a meaningful event. The husbands of three of the research partners became new believers after beginning transnational lifestyles. Therefore, it is very meaningful to Kirogi mothers that Kirogi living motivated their husbands to be believers.

*Children's growth in faith.* Three research partners also were grateful for their children's growth in faith. They believe that if they had not left Korea, this would not have happened. Bora shared that one of the reasons she chose a Kirogi living arrangement was to give her children an opportunity to have a more spiritual life in the United States:

*The reason we came here was this: My son didn't have faith, and until he began ninth grade, he professed that there is no God. However, there has been a big change and now his faith is growing at our church. It became harder for our family financially, but we have been growing spiritually.*

Cindy averred,

*Our lifestyle may not be viewed as successful from a worldly point of view, but my kids' meeting God and having the truth in their heart should be considered as a success. If we were still in Korea, I would have sent my kids to church only on Sundays and let them spend most of their time studying. But here my kids are more relaxed, spend more time with God's Word, and have God's heart planted in them. They even go on mission trips and spend their time more wisely for God, and I am sure God will lead and guide them through successful paths.*

Juhee said,

*I believe the Kirogi life actually led my kids in the right direction to become people of God. They were mere Sunday Christians before. Even though my oldest son went to summer retreats and VBS, he never did QT, maybe because his parents didn't do it . . . There was no opportunity to grow my kids' relationship with God . . . Here my kids took Discipleship Training and started growing spiritually. We are thankful that our kids' faith is growing.*

In sum, these women are satisfied with their lives in the U.S. because their children have had an opportunity to grow in faith in the U.S. Three of the research partners considered their children's spiritual growth as greatly meaningful in terms of their decision to engage in transnational living.

#### Self-Fulfillment

Eight research partners reported that Kirogi living has been meaningful because they have been able to achieve personal development. According to Mietzner, each person in the long-distance relationship has more of her or his own space and much more time and energy to accomplish personal goals and desires.<sup>399</sup> Thus, a couple's separation ultimately led to personal growth and the gaining of various skills. Three of the Kirogi mothers in my study stated that they thank God for guiding them to study theology.

Cindy stated,

*I told my husband that I was studying theology, and he didn't like it at first but later said okay after praying about it. So I told him not to change his mind later on, because I was going to seminary because he permitted it.*

Joyce shared,

*I am currently attending a seminary on an F1 visa because of my status. My pastor recommended that it would be beneficial since I was serving the praise ministry at church... I considered it, and it actually made sense . . . I am so*

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<sup>399</sup> Mietzner and Lin, 196.

*thankful to God for giving me this chance to study theology. I never knew, but it's all His guidance as I look back.*

Rose testified,

*I get excited and so happy when I imagine myself continuing to study theology. It would be great if I could devote the second half of my life to serving like that, and I would surely serve if God wants to use a person like me.*

On the other hand, other research partners reported that it is meaningful for them to achieve to personal growth in learning new things. Juhee stated,

*I went to language school at first, and then I became more fluent with English as I lived alone without my husband. I didn't have much chance before when my husband took care of most things, but now I get to speak more English. In that regard, I gained a lot and became successful.*

Linda shared, "I never had any hobbies, but now I read a lot of books here. The only luxury I get to enjoy is skincare. And I try to stay with and serve people who need me."

Pearl confessed, "I try to enjoy cultural life and watch musicals. . . . In fact, people tell me to study, but it's not fun for me. So I take violin and vocal lessons now. I enjoy it very much." Soeun said,

*I am learning the cello. During a seminar, I heard that I should invest in myself, so I started taking cello lessons with other persons. I look forward to each lesson, and I like it more because everyone in my group has passion. I often go to yoga and exercise . . . I am very devoted to my son, but I believe that I should be happy first. If I get tired, then I quickly try to shift to refresh myself. I like to enhance myself inside and out.*

Youee stated,

*I think I found myself somewhat, and I am most thankful for that personally. I gained self-confidence, too . . . God showed me some miracles one by one, and I think that I gave up, such as becoming a hairdresser, but serving people became a reality . . . I believe it is God-given confidence. I love what I do and I serve a lot.*

In sum, some of the Kirogi mothers found new meaning through self-achievement, studying, reading books, learning how to play musical instruments, and

gaining new skills during their Kirogi lives in the United States. Their growth and exploration appears to be a result of having more free time and their own space, and their personal achievements lead to greater self-confidence.

### Perspective Changes

Nine research partners reported experiencing perspective changes and a variety of *new awarenesses*, including *realizing the importance of family*, during their lives as Kirogi mothers in the U.S. Living in a different culture and place, Kirogi mothers encounter new values and worldviews that change their perspectives.

*New awarenesses.* Among the nine research partners who expressed a change in perspective while living in the U.S., six of them experienced various types of new awareness. They experienced their perspectives broadened and deepened. Christine explained,

*I discovered the oddity of immigrant society. It's built with pain and scars, which could collapse any minute. Many have been living a difficult life because of betrayals, pains, and children. I recently realized that I should comfort these people. It was difficult to realize because I have been just receiving. I've been thinking that they should comfort an outsider like me.*

Pearl shared,

*I heard a lot of stories from the single cell group. I never met anyone like that in my entire life. I cried a lot over their sad lives and learned lessons from them. I then realized why God sent me here.*

Youee said, "My mind and thoughts were broadened. When my husband said not to do it before, I just obeyed, but now with this newly earned confidence I told him I would take care of it and did it." Rose stated that she is happy to learn things that she did not know about her daughter before. According to her, her daughter is doing things that would have been difficult for her, and she is proud of the daughter to whom she gave birth. For Linda,

*One thing I changed my mind on was that now I am thankful to God for bringing me to the United States and consider it His blessing to live like this. During my life, I could have been getting old doing the same thing with the same people every day, but instead, I got to enjoy different experiences here for several years and witness the change in me. This must be a blessing in the top few percentiles.*

Through their experiences in the U.S., these Kirogi mothers discovered various new things, including things about themselves, that they had not known before when they were in Korea. They commonly consider these new learnings as blessings from God and are grateful for them.

*Realizing the importance of family.* Five research partners newly realized how important family is. Bora and Christine discovered that the marital relationship is more important than the parent-child relationship. Bora shared,

*So I realized that the husband-wife relationship is the most important thing. It's not the children. They are important indeed, but after a while they think that they can raise themselves. The only thing remaining later is the couple, but there could be harder obstacles later if the gap becomes greater now. . . . Thankfully, God made me realize this now, so it's like a honeymoon now.*

Christine stated,

*The fact that you have someone to go to bed with even for a moment. . . . That was big, and I didn't know. I didn't realize that it gave me strength. God must have sent me here to realize how precious my husband is because I didn't know.*

Hongmi's and Joyce's realizations of the importance of family led them to assert that families should live together. Hongmi stated, "There is no guarantee that my kids will turn out well here in the future, and it is still all up to them in Korea as well. I still think the family should be together if possible." Joyce shared,

*Although I gained a lot of things here, still the family is important. Until the kids grow up and leave, I believe the family should stay together somehow. I think it is important for the family to live together. But if we live together again now, it will still be hard to get adjusted all over again.*

Youee said,

*The important thing is for the family to live together harmoniously, but I think I lost that. These days I think a lot about the dinner time. Having all the family members sit around and eat together is what is precious. When my husband first came here, he cried at every dinnertime. I asked him why, and he said eating together like that was happiness. I didn't understand it at that time, but as time went by, I came to realize it. It's not the fancy meal at the nice restaurant. . . . We used to share even a small meal together . . . and that's the right thing to do.*

These women have newly realized the importance of family and regret losing the opportunity for their families to live together, although the Kirogi lifestyle is beneficial for their children's education. In sum, more than half of the research partners said that their perspectives in how they see themselves, others, and society have been broadened, and they believe that God led them to the U.S. to give them new awarenesses and a realization of the importance of family.

### Roles of the Korean Immigrant Church

The theme of roles of the Korean immigrant church resulted and saturated in five attributing factors: *causing feelings of marginality, providing religious activities and purpose, ministering to psychological needs, supplying social opportunities, and assisting with practical needs.*

### Causing Feelings of Marginality

For Korean Christian Kirogi mothers, the Korean immigrant church can be the most appropriate place for feeling a sense of belonging. However, nine research partners reported that they experienced feelings of marginality in the church. The reasons are because of *vulnerability* due to fear of being gossiped about and difficulty approaching others, being an *object of envy*, feeling like the *object of prejudices*, and *couple-focused ministries*.



*Vulnerability.* Six of research partners informed me that they feel a vulnerability that causes them a sense of not belonging. Among them, four Kirogi mothers said that they are afraid of being gossiped about, so they are not actively involved in church activities. Christine shared,

*We have a small group meeting to cater to that kind of need, but people are reluctant to join with a fear that your conversation may be leaked. Because I need to be honest. Surprisingly, many people are afraid of it. How would the things I say come back . . . That's why you can't handle it. You try to hold it to yourself, even if it hurts inside. If you share it, then the problems happen.*

Lisa said,

*I was part of a single small group just for Kirogi mothers . . . Those mothers didn't like their private lives being exposed. We were really good among ourselves but didn't like it when outsiders joined us.*

On the other hand, four Kirogi mothers reported their sense of vulnerability due to the unique characteristics of immigrant society. Therefore, for some of them, it is not easy to approach Korean immigrants in the church. Christine indicated that this is because of the oddity of immigrant society. For her, Korean immigrants in the church seemed indifferent and harsh toward others. Pearl stated that most immigrants in her church struggle financially and do not have free time; this produces a cold atmosphere.

Soeun shared,

*The first six months until I opened up my heart was the difficult time. It was very uneasy, but I decided not to look at people and just go. I couldn't feel the warmth, because the daily immigrant life seemed too tired. My only concern was how to be a part of the group. A Kirogi mother's life is lonely and hard, but there are many with much harder lives. Kirogi mothers still have luxuries. Even the divorcees have more difficulties and heart-breaking lives. Many live day to day.*

Youee said,

*The immigrants are smart but very opinionated and rough. Probably because of their hard lives. Many Koreans here are tough as if there are thorns inside them. It must be so because of the harsh environment. So I didn't have anyone to talk to*

*heart to heart.*

Thus, some Korean Kirogi mothers have felt vulnerable due to the unique atmosphere of the Korean immigrant community, such as harshness, indifference, opinionated attitudes, coldness, and tiredness. This has contributed to their difficulty in belonging to Korean immigrant society, even in the church.

*Object of envy.* Six research partners reported their experience of feeling marginalized in the Korean immigrant church because they became the target of envy due to their relative financial affluence and having husbands in Korea. Joyce shared,

*Immigrants here are having a hard time now, even with husbands. Because I don't worry about money and spend what my husband faithfully sends me, I think there is some jealousy.*

Juhee confessed,

*My small group is for the singles, mainly the ones never married or divorced. I cannot say to them that I miss my husband. When they say I can study and my husband sends me money, then I feel very sorry for them.*

Karen said,

*As I am in a small group with people who became singles, there are a few things I need to be careful about. I don't talk about my husband. It's not really thoughtfulness, but I have to be considerate. I am not rich but I do not have difficulties either . . .*

Lisa stated,

*There surely are some negative views toward Kirogi mothers. "Who are those people just spending money, and their husbands living separately in Korea." . . . So rather than showing sympathy, people are jealous.*

Pearl shared,

*Every time my husband comes, he buys me a brand name bag. Then people say, "He bought you another one? How can he buy you one every time he comes?" I think there is jealousy. But still I don't try to hide them. Yes, I believe people may talk badly about Kirogi mothers out of jealousy.*

Soeun said,

*People view me as rich. As I am tall, I think people see me as rich. There is a social stigma that Kirogi mothers live without difficulties. There might have been some jealousy in the beginning, but after serving quietly, now people view me nicely.*

*Object of prejudices.* Three research partners reported their experience of feeling prejudice directed against them. Like prejudices from persons outside the church, church members also reveal prejudiced beliefs that Kirogi mothers have many problems.

Christine said, I was treated badly even at church. There was also too much prejudice when people viewed Kirogi mothers. Church people have negative perspectives, too.

Cindy stated,

*Church people generalize as if all Kirogi mothers have problems . . . I tried to take it in a good intention as there really are many problems involving Kirogi mothers. But I get upset when people talk about the things that didn't even happen.*

Pearl observed,

*Although women living alone should be extra careful, it can be taken in a wrong way as people talk about it ultimately. There is no need to meet the pastor. It's something talked about.*

Since Kirogi mothers are blamed for living without their husbands and are suspected of having loose morals, these research partners have become cautious and feel like they do not belong in their churches.

*Couple-focused ministries.* Korean immigrant churches not only provide safety and comfort but they seem to also present cultural limitations because they maintain traditional cultural values, such as male dominance and women's submission to men in

public life.<sup>400</sup> Five research partners reported that couple-focused ministries in the church make them feel marginalized. Lisa shared,

*People treat Kirogi mothers differently than the couples at church. Inevitably, the church is couples-oriented. Women with husbands seem to get better treatment at church. Even if there is an opportunity for ministry and the candidates are equally qualified, the one with a husband has the advantage.*

Rose stated,

*I wish there was no distinction for Kirogi mothers. I hope people do not label Kirogi mothers and pass judgment on us. Why discriminate? Why are we excluded from serving duties at church, while women with husbands are serving? It didn't seem like there was discrimination, but all of a sudden it became apparent.*

Pearl said,

*I wasn't aware of this, but what was difficult was that the church was couples-oriented. Actually, American society is couples-oriented. So I am happy when my husband comes. We worship together, eat together, then I feel I am alive.*

Christine shared,

*I went to a small group with couples, and I was the only single. I was confident at first, but more and more I became uncomfortable and withdrawn, and eventually silent. I figured this was what it meant to be without a husband, and I realized that my interpersonal relationships were diminishing.*

What Christine said reveals how Kirogi mothers gradually become silent in the church.

Couple-focused ministries in Korean immigrant churches make Kirogi mothers feel disadvantaged and marginalized. This is congruent with Ahn's finding that the focus of Korean immigrant churches on families and or married couples has also led to the blaming of Kirogi mothers for abandoning their families, especially their husbands, for the sake of their children.<sup>401</sup>

#### Providing Religious Activities and Purpose

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<sup>400</sup> Ai Ra Kim, 19-34.

<sup>401</sup> Kyung Ju Ahn, 106.

Nine Kirogi mothers reported that they are involved in church activities. Christine said that she was determined to be confident when she first went to church and searched for the department where she could serve. Joyce stated that she became more active when she joined the choir after about a year. Soeun also shared,

*I was thinking about my identity and realized that I was happy when abiding in God's Word. So I decided to put my values in my home and church and started to look for the things I can do. From then on, I began serving in many places at church.*

Youee said, I volunteered as a singer at church. I long for that time, and I can feel that God is pleased as I offer up myself to Him. I get blessed. I enjoy doing it. These research partners revealed that when they decided to join in church activities, they became more confident and active. In this way, church plays a positive role for Kirogi mothers.

#### Ministering to Psychological Needs

Seven research partners reported their positive experiences in having their psychological needs fulfilled in Korean immigrant churches. They demonstrated that the church serves Kirogi mothers' psychological needs *for comfort, direction, and a sense of security.*

*Comfort.* Five research partners reported that they experienced comfort in the Korean immigrant church. Christine confessed,

*I didn't have faith when I was in Korea. I just attended church. There is no place to go here, so I went to church. You can't survive without church here. I got comforted. Of course there are negative things at church, but I go because God's grace is bigger.*

Pearl shared that she attends the church near her home and she really like the atmosphere as if "God's grace was warm and embracing." Her husband also tore up inside the

sanctuary when they went together. Joyce shared her experience in the church in the early years:

*Having people to talk to made me happier than the service itself. I liked the family-like atmosphere. Everyone greeted us nicely... They genuinely wanted to help us . . . Even the pastor helped us to get well adjusted.*

Linda stated,

*The most important thing the church should provide is leading us to a good small group so we can take care of our emotional difficulties. This is more helpful than spending money and time. Relationship is the key.*

Youee shared her positive experience in the church after moving to a different church:

*Rather than doing it out loud, the church should be open-minded and patient so we could come join comfortably. And then encourage us once in a while... Agree with us... I think that's how to build trust . . . As God opened up my heart... it is really good meeting and talking with them, especially the sharing about our faith.*

*Direction.* Two Kirogi mothers reported that the Korean immigrant church gave them direction as to where to go. Bora said,

*On the first day, the pastor spoke about Kirogi families during the sermon, and said the couple just needs to live together. He said living apart is not biblical, even if you came for the children's education . . . We liked it . . . Yes, we cannot possibly get compliments all the time.*

Youee stated, "The pastor went on to say, 'Go back to Korea as it not good to be separated from your husband.'" These two women thought over what they heard from the church and tried to follow the direction they had received.

*A sense of security.* Lastly, one Kirogi mother reported feeling secure in the church. Soeun shared,

*The pastor doesn't ask how I ended up here. He doesn't try to find out, but just respects me. So we discuss many important issues but never mention this personal matter. He thanked me when I shared it later on.*

Soeun did not want to expose the conflict in her marital relationship. Her pastor's attitude

made her feel accepted as she is and secure in being protected by her pastor.

In sum, most of the Kirogi mothers desire to find psychological and spiritual comfort in the church. The Korean immigrant churches support Kirogi mothers by offering psychological solace, a sense of security, and direction. These findings are consistent with Ahn's assertion that Korean churches can be essential places for Kirogi mothers, providing social activities, psychological relief, and spiritual empowerment.<sup>402</sup>

### Supplying Social Opportunities

The small Bible study groups or other small groups in the Korean immigrant churches provide resources for Kirogi mothers to connect to a social network. They have fellowship and gather information in the church. Six Kirogi mothers reported that they meet weekly with a small group for Bible study, and it provides them a chance for social interaction and making friends with other Koreans. Cindy said that she attends a singles small group. There were some divorcees besides Kirogi mothers, and they were all very nice to her. So she reported that she had a good time with them. Hongmi also stated,

*There are three couples and three Kirogi mothers, but we are all like real brothers and sisters. As they are older than me, it feels like they are my older brothers and sisters. The group before was great too. We comfortably open up 100% and share everything. We even meet during Korean Thanksgiving and major holidays and celebrate together, and it feels like a family gathering. Kirogi mothers are doing well there, and when husbands come, we all gather.*

Joyce shared,

*Large churches have Kirogi small groups. At first I was hopeful that would help as people in similar situations understand each other. Another Kirogi mother totally understood what I was sharing about. People who are not separated do not understand my heart. That Kirogi mother was concerned as if it was her matter, and then I realized why Kirogi mothers meet separately.*

Karen said, "I have been attending for a long time and got close with everyone. We know

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<sup>402</sup> Kyung Ju Ahn, 108.

each other's characters." Pearl shared,

*The Kirogi mothers in my small group were a perfect fit for me as all of us were in similar situations, like flexible time and comfortable living. We were always available to go out together without husbands, to beaches and nice places. It was really fun.*

### Assisting with Practical Needs

Most of the Kirogi mothers whom I interviewed wanted to receive practical help from the church. Some of the Korean immigrant churches shared responsibility for settling new Kirogi mothers and assisted them in opening bank accounts, buying cars, and finding apartments. Six research partners reported that their churches provided them with practical help. Joyce shared that when she was lonely in the beginning, they paid attention to her and helped her get adjusted. Rose reported,

*One Kirogi mother got in touch with my church even before she arrived here and got help for everything. Getting a house and a driver's license, the church helped her a lot. Although I didn't have a hard time getting adjusted here, the church member paid attention to me a lot.*

Hongmi stated,

*My church has a New Family Team to care for newcomers. They help obtain lawyers, realtors, etc. This helps the newcomers get adjusted to a new life here. Their help is so systematic and consistent, and they make phone calls to ask for anything the newcomers may need. Their care during the first few months like this really helps the newcomers start well.*

Karen said,

*There was a seminar at a local church about the difficulties of Kirogi mothers. It was about the difficulty in providing education . . . I was surprised that some people are actually considerate about those issues.*

Jisoo would have liked some of the help these women received: "I wish there could be help for practical things, such as assistance on banking and English. . . . I think



providing the practical day-to-day help is so important.” Pearl shared some similar thoughts:

*It would be much appreciated if there could be help for the things that a woman alone might not be able to do well. It is very difficult when the car breaks down or I have a flat tire. Although I can take care of most of the necessities, there are certain things that I am not good with. There are ants all over my house, and some help on spraying pesticide would be nice . . . Those kinds of help would be so much appreciated. There is not much help I need other than those few things.*

Juhee also suggested,

*I think there should be a Kirogi mothers' meeting. Just as high school upperclassmen take care of newcomers, they exchange helpful information and hints about church life.*

One of the important roles of Korean immigrant churches is providing Korean Christian Kirogi mothers with practical assistance in adjusting to their new environments. Serving in this role is more urgent than other roles, since adjustment is primary for Kirogi mothers. The practical needs that Kirogi mothers want help with include getting settled in a house, gaining information about their children's educations, and being integrated into church life.

### Mothers' Theological Views of Family Separation

Among the thirteen research partners, eight Kirogi mothers reported that family separation is “*not a sin*,” three Kirogi mothers believed the “*family should be together*,” and two Kirogi mothers said that it was “*God's guidance*” that led them down this path.

#### Not a Sin

Eight Kirogi mothers reported that they do not believe that family separation is sin. Christine stated,

*No, the Bible says not to be separated other than when praying. I agree that it needs to be like that. However, it's also true that just staying together doesn't*

*necessarily benefit the kids in terms of education. In this era of globalization, my kids cannot stay inside like a frog in a little pond.*

Cindy also said,

*It is biblically not right for a couple to be separated . . . But people around me say that when a couple is separated, Satan works to manipulate the relationship. My husband and I never thought about it that way.*

The Bible passage that most of the research partners referred to is 1 Corinthians 7:5: “Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.” (NRSV)

Hongmi shared,

*I have never heard of such a thing. Well . . . is there such a thing in the Bible? I don't remember seeing it . . . I don't pay attention to those things, but if it's no good, then we should get back together right away. We should really try to live together again soon. It's true that couples shouldn't live separately for too long.*

Joyce said,

*It was hard spiritually at first, but the Word gave me freedom in my heart. I came to realize that God is the one who is free and understood what it means to be free when I live in the truth. It is just a wrong faith to believe that I must do this and that.*

Juhee confessed,

*I heard that a pastor said that it is against God to be a Kirogi, but I don't necessarily agree with that. It was from a pastor in the United States. Perhaps it may have a point, but I don't believe that God would tell me that it's against His law when He considers the situation I am in at this time. I think of it as that pastor's point of view, and therefore I don't feel guilty.*

Lisa stated, “It sure doesn't look right biblically to be separated, but I believe it is all right under certain circumstances.” Pearl reported that she does not feel guilty even though her pastor mentions it from time to time. She has been focused on her situation and believes that her situation led her to come to the U.S., but it's not a sin. Soeun said,

*I didn't consider it biblically when I came. Now I think it's not good biblically, but it is inevitable under the circumstances. I just feel that we need to try harder to live well. We should be all right by keeping up with the Word, trust, and our faith. My husband is the one I should love. It is still not easy, so I pray that we may not face any difficulties in the future.*

In sum, some research partners do not believe that family separation is a sin if it is not for too long a period of time. Others do not feel guilt about their family's separation because they think it is justified in certain situations and because they believe God is not legalistic.

#### The Family Should Be Together

Two Kirogi mothers stated that the family should be together. Bora shared, "I feel somewhat guilty. As the church says, couples shouldn't live separately . . . We were especially sensitive about it. That is why my husband came to the United States and stayed with us last year." Rose said,

*Kirogi families already became a culture, and there are many cases now. We all began with good intentions . . . There's got to be a reason God wanted couples to live together. Perhaps it is unlawful in the eyes of God for man and woman to live separately. There should be a firm spiritual foundation.*

#### God's Guidance

Three Kirogi mothers regarded family separation as not only not sinful but believed that their Kirogi living arrangement was a result of *God's guidance*. Karen said,

*There is a trend for each particular time. There are many cases where modern culture doesn't allow a family to live under one roof. If there is God's will here, He will allow us to come early and be educated here; if not, there must be His will in Korea. . . . I prayed in Korea that God would block our way to here during the preparation stage should this not be God's will.*

Linda shared,

*But with continuous prayer, I shouldn't have decided to come if I had a conviction that God doesn't want us here and it's a sin. I also felt that bringing us here might*

*be what God is doing in our lives. In spite of my decision, He still works through it. I am convinced that He is still our Lord guiding us through. It's not like we came to the United States to betray God, and I consider this opportunity as another challenge in life. I expect God to make necessary changes in our lives here.*

Although most of the Kirogi mothers regret their family's separation, they do not consider it sinful. Some actually regarded it as part of God's plan or as a result of God's guidance.

### Summary of Findings

Eight themes emerged from the data. In this section, I will discuss my findings in relation to the cultural and social contexts studied and presented previously in my literature review and in Chapter 2. These will then be reanalyzed in Chapter 5 using relational cultural theory and feminist practical theology. Most of the themes from the data reflect well current Korean contexts, which have developed out of a combination of traditional Korean values and contemporary social contexts. The first theme of *reasons for the decision to leave* has two sub-themes. The primary reason all of the research partners had for coming to the U.S. was related to their children's education: they were *pursuing a better educational environment for their children*. This is consistent with the literature that reveals that contemporary Korean parents are greatly devoted to their children's education. As noted earlier, Korean women identify themselves primarily as mothers focused on achieving their family's collective goal of their children's success. Thus, their own careers, self-achievement, and marital ties are less important than their children's education. Some research partners revealed that they quit their careers to be devoted to their children's education. This devotion implies that Korean mothers identify their children's achievements as theirs, which is a phenomenon that can be attributed to

the traditional Korean family system. In congruence with the literature review, the research partners reportedly tried hard to be supermoms, considering mothering a full time job. This indicates that the roles and expectations of contemporary Korean women are even greater than traditional roles.

As Cha and Kim indicated in their work, a role-based family system and a mother-child-centered family system contributed to the decision of the research partners to leave for Korea and helped them maintain their family ties during the separation.<sup>403</sup> Most research partners confirmed that their family structure is congruent with the literature review; the responsibilities of the traditional Korean women to the domestic domain have been reinforced, and thus, Korean men are alienated from their families. In combination with this kind of family structure, most research partners bravely left Korea when they were dissatisfied with the Korean educational system and their children's achievement or felt helpless as mothers.

Korean mothers feel anxious and competitive. It is confirmed that they regarded English as very important for their children's success in this globalized era. The research partners' responding to *societal pressure* also confirmed what was reviewed in the literature about Korean education contexts: due to the announcement of the Korean government's 1996 globalization policy, a lot of students left Korea to study English in English-speaking countries. This stimulated some of the research partners to decide to leave for an English-speaking country, the U.S. In this regard, one research partner stated that Korean society makes mothers drive themselves hard. As Jaeyeon Chung says, however, the research partners were not aware of their mothering role as a sacrifice for

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<sup>403</sup> Cha and Kim, 3.

the sake of others, because self-sacrifice is unconsciously socially constructed.<sup>404</sup>

However, some of the research partners became aware of their mother role as excessive self-sacrificial later in their time of Kirogi living and reported that they regret deciding to engage in a Kirogi living arrangement; thus, they attempted to seek their own identities and spend time aimed at *self-achievement*, which belongs to the theme of *constructing meaning*.

This sub-theme of pursuing a better educational environment is closely linked with the sub-theme of *educational manager* under the theme of *Kirogi mothering*. Most research partners' role as educational manager continued in the U.S. as an important part of mothering that focuses only on academic achievement so children can go to a good college. However, a few of the research participants faced challenges in conducting this role due to language and cultural barriers, which resulted in *parentification* and *diminished mother roles*, also under the theme of *Kirogi mothering*. Although Korean women sacrifice themselves for their family over their own needs, in this study, not only Kirogi mothers but also Kirogi fathers made sacrifices, in that they both faced living separate from one another. Despite their sacrifices, however, the research partners are stigmatized due to stereotypical images of them as both submissive and strong, which is discussed by Kelly Chong.<sup>405</sup>

Interestingly, another reason for engaging in a Kirogi living arrangement is to *escape from strained relationships with husbands and in-laws*. More than half of the research partners shared that they wanted to escape from conflictive relationships with their husbands. They made a justifiable separation by becoming Kirogi mothers and

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<sup>404</sup> Jaeyeon Chung, 52.

<sup>405</sup> Kelly H. Chong, 142.

maintaining a transnational living arrangement. One of them said that her husband put a lot of restrictions on her, while he was able to enjoy freedom, spending money freely and meeting his friends outside the home. This is a typical example of the hierarchical relationship between husbands and wives that can be observed in Korean families: the wife is supposed to serve her husband and family, including in-law-families. Thus, these research partners felt comparatively free during their time of separation. In this sense, the sub-theme of *escaping* is connected to *feeling freedom*, a sub-theme of *factors supporting the maintenance of Kirogi life*. One research partner stated that she enjoys her single life free from conflicts due to different lifestyles between her and her husband, and other research partners also reported feeling free from strong obligations to their husbands' families. This implies that they feel free from traditional Korean women's roles and duties, and this freedom makes their Kirogi lifestyle sustainable. The sub-theme of *escaping* is also related to the sub-theme *self-fulfilment* under the theme of *constructing meaning*. Some research partners' family separations created free time for them, and this ultimately led to their personal growth through learning new things and gaining new skills, such as learning how to play a musical instrument. For some of them, their personal achievements promoted self-confidence.

The second theme is *family dynamics*. The research partners shared how their family relationships were maintained or changed during their experiences of transnational living. Some of them experienced *tense relationships* due to marital conflicts and conflicts with children. The conflicts happened because of the couple's separation and the changed roles of the mothers. During the separation, Kirogi couples want to be compensated by their spouses but become upset when their needs are not satisfied. Thus,

the longer they are separated, the more they fear being together again, because this results in more marital conflicts. In the beginning their relationship conflicts and as time goes on comfortable and it seems make them fear of reunion. These research partners felt uncomfortable when their Kirogi husbands visited because they had adjusted to living alone. Another cause of marital conflicts is the cultural gap that forms between husbands and wives. While Kirogi fathers usually tend to keep patriarchal traditions, some Kirogi mothers accepted new perspectives after living in the U.S. Thus, their thinking processes and even their levels of faith become different, which creates *tense relationships* between Kirogi couples. While *gaining new perspectives* causes tension in marital relationships, these perspectives also become resources in Kirogi mothers' lives for *constructing new meaning*.

More than half of the research partners also shared that they experienced *conflicts with their children*. Like the cultural gap experienced between marriage partners, Kirogi parents and their children in this study experienced a cultural gap between them that contributed to tension in Kirogi families. The cultural gap between fathers and their children was more prevalent than that between mothers and children, due to the traditional patriarchal Korean fathers' mindset and the mother-child-centered family system. Traditional Korean parents generally tend to criticize their children as being disrespectful and failing to contribute to the harmony of the family. Thus, some Kirogi fathers who are accustomed to Confucian hierarchical relations were embarrassed by their children's attitudes toward them, which were considered disrespectful. Differences in cultural relating cause gradual disconnections among Kirogi family members. That is why the role of Kirogi mothers as *mediators*, a subtheme of *Kirogi mothering*, became



important for them.

On the other hand, it is reported that some of the research partners' couple and father-child relationships were improved by having more and longer conversations and spending longer and more quality time with each other. Some research partners revealed that, in Korea, their husbands always came home late and were only able to see their children sleeping at night, but whenever the Kirogi fathers visited the U.S., they attempted to have more conversations and to spend time together with their family members. The transnational living arrangement became an opportunity for these Kirogi families to understand each other better and have closer relationships than before. In particular, some Kirogi couples treated each other better and felt sorry for one another. More than half of the Kirogi mothers also reported an increase in trust, which sustained their marital relationships. Some of them confessed that their faith in God improved their marital ties during the Kirogi living arrangement. In this study, it was found that many Kirogi mothers' Christian faith was positively correlated with the health of their marital relationships. On the other hand, others' *tense or distant relationships (lack of intimacy)* with their husbands or children contributed not only to *their spiritual growth* but also to *their family members' spiritual growth*, which are subthemes of *constructing meaning*.

Most of the Kirogi mothers in this study said that they feel a *lack of intimacy* in their family relationships because of a lack of time spent together, whether their relationships improved or not. This is representative of the typical traditional Korean couple relationship. One research partner reportedly wants emotional connection, but her husband does not seem to and only concentrates on supplying the practical necessities of the family. Another research partner shared that she is thankful for her sincere husband

who sends money, but she feels emotionally distant from him. According to a third research partner, her routine conversations with her husband bore her. This implies that for most of the Kirogi families in this study, the role-based couple relationship continues during the separation, so most research partners do not experience emotional connection with their spouses. Moreover, their difficulty in sharing their sexual needs with their husbands contributes to their lack of felt intimacy. As described, the traditional value that women should not be expressive seems to influence their difficulty in sharing, and their husbands are typical traditional males as well. Overall, most of the Kirogi couples seem to have enhanced intimate relationships as compared to their relationships when they were in Korea. As noted, it is very proper for them to maintain their family ties for the sake of fulfilling their collective family goals. However, in this study, most of the research partners lamented that they were losing prime time in their married life and a paternal role model for their children as well. This feeling is related to their *perspective change*, which is a subtheme of *constructing meaning*. Their traditional perspective of the child-centered family changed to a couple-centered family.

The third theme is *Kirogi mothering*. Most of the research partners continued the model of a traditional gender division of labor between the wife as nurturer and the husband as provider. They regarded *educational management* as an important part of mothering, focusing solely on the academic achievement of their children so they could go to a good college, just as they did in Korea. Another role for Kirogi mothers is the role of *mediator*. Mediation is a continuation of the traditional mother role that bridges the relationship between the father and the child to help them communicate. On the other hand, the research partners also shared that they perform different mother roles in the

U.S. compared to the mother roles played in Korea. The most distinctive new role of Kirogi mothers is as *head of household*. This role added to the burdensome responsibilities they already carried, since they now had the heavy responsibility of being the sole guardian for their children. This observation is congruent with the literature review. Other research partners experienced *diminishing mother roles* due to language and cultural barriers, as described under the theme of *family dynamics*. Some of them experienced their children's *parentification* as a role reversal role resulting from language and cultural barriers. *Kirogi mothering*, regardless of increasing or decreasing roles, affects the themes, *facing challenges*, *lack of self-fulfillment*, *constructing meaning*; and *spiritual growth*. Due to their heavy responsibilities as *education managers*, they have no time, energy, or financial resources to take care of themselves or satisfy their needs, which contributes to their *lack of self-fulfillment*. However, some of the research partners engaged in increased supplications to God for assistance because of their feelings of helplessness. They prayed more and gained a deeper relationship with God as they sought to resolve their predicaments, and as a result, they experienced *spiritual growth*.

The next theme is *facing challenges*. As described earlier, Kirogi mothers face various kinds of challenges living in a foreign country. Most of the research partners reported that their unstable legal resident status, especially temporary visa status, has made their lives in the U.S. challenging. To gain legal visa status, some of them enrolled in schools to study language, music, computer science, theology, and so on. *Facing challenges* is related to the themes of *constructing meaning* and *self-fulfillment*. Many research partners, especially the ones who began theological studies, unexpectedly found new meaning in their lives through their studies. Most of the research partners also faced

challenges in dealing with social prejudices toward them in the Korean community and the Korean immigrant church. Congruent with the literature on Kirogi mothers, they are criticized, both in Korea and in Korean communities in the new country, because they are not guided by a male head in the family and are considered to have loose morals. Some research partners reported that they are considered as being easily tempted to be unfaithful to their husbands. Therefore, some of them were vulnerable and self-conscious about how they might be viewed as women living apart from their husbands. Another challenge they face is a *lack of self-achievement*, which has already been discussed. For other research partners, *loneliness* is the one of the biggest challenges of living in the U.S. This results from feeling *marginalized* and isolated from the Korean community and Korean immigrant churches. Many of the women described the Kirogi living arrangement as a “wilderness.” Not only *loneliness* but also *adjusting* to a mainstream culture has been challenging for some of the research partners due to language barriers and cultural differences. Finally, some research partners shared financial difficulties as being a challenging factor.

The fifth theme is *factors supporting the maintenance of Kirogi life*. First, what sustains Kirogi mothers’ lives in the U.S. is their *children’s satisfaction*. Most research partners were motivated to continue their Kirogi living because their children are stable, enjoy their school lives, and have more fun in the U.S. compared to in Korea. This theme is closely related to the theme of *reasons for the decision to leave*. Since the primary reason for the Kirogi living arrangement was bettering their children’s education, the mothers can maintain this arrangement as long as they see their children benefitting from it. The use of *modern technology*, such as phone calls, emails, videophones, and webcams,

along with *their husband's frequent visits and stability*, also helped some of the research partners' continue the Kirogi living arrangement. For more than half of the research partners, living in a *Korean community* helped them sustain their lives in the U.S., especially in California. Thus, they reportedly experienced less culture shock, less stress related to having to use English, and easy accessibility to social relationships. However, for others research partners, living in California meant they *felt prejudice* from other Korean Americans, which is related to the theme of *facing challenges*. As mentioned earlier, Kirogi mothers' *feeling of freedom* from in-law-relationships also helps them sustain their Kirogi living arrangement, while some women's own character traits, such as *independence* and being *active*, influence their life stability. Half of the research partners stated that they do not ask for help and enjoy American culture. It is not certain whether not asking for help is because they are independent or they want to be invisible. Therefore, I included both characteristics of independence and activeness as being present in this theme. Another factor in being able to sustain their lives in the U.S. is support from *acquaintances living in California*. Finally, their limited *length of stay* has helped a few research partners endure their Kirogi lives in the United States.

The sixth theme is *constructing meaning*. The research partners discovered new meaning during their Kirogi living arrangements from their *families' spiritual growth*, *self-fulfillment*, and *perspective changes*, which were mentioned earlier. All the research partners reported that not only they but their families experienced *spiritual growth*. Most research partners confessed improvement in their faith and came to place their meaning on their relationship with God, which helps them maintain their lives in the U.S. For other partners, their *husbands' growth in faith* is also meaningful to them. Three Kirogi

mothers found meaning in their *children's* active church involvement and *increased faith*. Not only their spiritual growth but their *self-fulfillment* makes Kirogi mothers' lives meaningful. Many research partners also experienced *perspective changes* in respect to self-identity and family values. They experienced their perspectives as being broadened and deepened. Among them, five Kirogi mothers realized the importance of family, and especially, of the primacy of the marital relationship above the parent-child relationship. These perspective changes take Kirogi mothers beyond traditional beliefs and into new ways of perceiving themselves, their roles, and their family structures.

The seventh theme is *roles of the Korean immigrant church*. According to the research partners, the Korean immigrant church plays both positive and negative roles in their lives. The only negative role is the contribution of the Korean immigrant church to *feelings of marginality*. More than half of the research partners experienced feelings of marginality due to a sense of *vulnerability* related to being gossiped about, *being an object of envy* and *object of prejudices*, and *couple-focused ministries*. Their reason for becoming the target of envy was due to financial affluence. Hence, one research partner stated that church members are jealous of Kirogi mothers rather than showing sympathy for them. A few research partners also reported that they were the *object of prejudices*; church members generalize as if all Kirogi mothers have many problems, so the mothers become cautious and feel like they do not belong to the church. Not only becoming an object of jealousy and prejudices but *couple-focused ministries* make Kirogi mothers feel excluded, and they become passive, which finally leads them to feeling marginalized. One research partner reported that women with husbands receive better treatment from the church. These observations are congruent with the literature review.

For the research partners, other roles of the Korean immigrant church are positive. One of them is *providing religious activities and purpose* that makes Kirogi mothers feel like they belong and that allow them to become active in their congregations. The church also provides for *psychological needs*: many of the research partners experienced emotional comforting when they went to church through just attending worship and small groups. The fellowship with church members helps them feel comforted and builds trust with church members. As one research partner shared, although some Kirogi mothers feel hurt and isolated in the church, others must feel comforted psychologically and spiritually through attending church. Most of them reported that they participate in small Bible group. Furthermore, small Bible study groups or other small groups in Korean immigrant churches provide a place of fellowship and *social interaction*. Some of the research partners reported they are relieved when they experience God's direction through the sermon, and they feel a *sense of security* when they perceive an attitude of acceptance coming from the senior pastor. Finally, most of the research partners stated that one of the most important roles of the church is *providing practical help* for them to adjust to Kirogi living in the United States.

The last theme is *The mothers' theological views of family separation*. Most of the research partners believed that the family separation of the Kirogi living arrangement is *not a sin*. Some of them know that the Bible does not allow couples to separate other than when praying (1 Corinthians 7:5). However, they stated that family separation is not a sin when it is not too long. Others do not feel guilty because of the particularities of their situation and because they believe God is not legalistic. A few of the Kirogi mothers even considered their family separation as being a result of *God's guidance*. However, two

research partners had determined that *families should never separate*. One of them who felt guilty planned to go back to Korea soon.



## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

This chapter presents an analysis of my findings using the hermeneutical perspective of feminist pastoral theology and the psychotherapeutic framework of relational-cultural theory (RCT). The practical theological method is to establish an interdisciplinary dialogue among diverse sources and then to provide a theological framework based upon the dialogue, using a critical correlational method. Practical theology is itself an interpretive or hermeneutical task. Since this study uses poststructural, contextual, and pragmatic feminist perspectives, it explores the multiple meanings of the Korean Christian Kirogi mothers' experiences, including hidden values that might be in opposition to preexisting values.

As manifested earlier, this study is pastorally theological, feminist, accountable, and places final authority on transforming structures.<sup>406</sup> The multiple meanings of the Korean Christian Kirogi mothers' life experiences are explored, and those meanings are contextual and pragmatic so that they can be used to shape the practice of ministry in Korean immigrant church settings.

#### Discussion of Findings through the Lenses Relational Cultural Theory

In this section, Korean Christian Kirogi mothers' lived experiences are analyzed from the psychological perspective of relational cultural theory in terms of connection and disconnection, mutuality, and authenticity. Relational-cultural psychotherapy reexamines women's relationality and stresses relationship and connection rather than separateness and autonomy. For Korean Christian Kirogi mothers, relationships are

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<sup>406</sup> Doehring, "A Method of Feminist Pastoral Theology," 95-111.

important because their family relationships and semi-immigrant contexts have affected their adjustment. Thus, through RCT, Korean Kirogi mothers' relationships are examined not only from the perspective of individuals' experiences as influenced by patriarchy but also from the context of living in a foreign country as guardians for their children, rather than as immigrants.

Relational psychologists have challenged the traditional notion of self and developed a new theory about women's sense of self, because the traditional notion of self-sufficiency does not seem to fit women's experiences.<sup>407</sup> They developed a new understanding of women's development from a relational perspective. An alternative view of self, a relational self, is distinguished from the traditional individuated self or autonomous self.<sup>408</sup> Jordan claims that the traditional concept of self overemphasizes a separated self at the cost of connectedness and community. She suggests a "mutual forming process" of self, other, and the relationship so that the individual can achieve a greater goal than that of individual gratification.<sup>409</sup>

Connection begins with emotional sharing, openness, and a shared sense of understanding and positive regard. Emotional and cognitive connection are important in relationships. Mutual empathy leads to mutual empowerment. The relational model neither pathologizes nor idealizes women and relationships. Empowering relationships are the goal of growth work. Disruptions to growth and development result in disconnection. In this study, the Korean Christian Kirogi mothers I interviewed presented

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<sup>407</sup> Jean Baker Miller, "Women's Growth in Connection," in *The Development of Women's Sense of Self*, ed. Jean Baker Miller (Wellesley, MA: Wellesley College, Stone Center, 1984), 1-26.

<sup>408</sup> Miller, "Women's Growth in Connection," 1-26.

<sup>409</sup> Judith V. Jordan, "Do You Believe that Concepts of Self and Autonomy are Useful in Understanding Women?" in *Women's Growth in Diversity*, ed. Judith V. Jordan (New York: Guilford Press, 1997), 29-32.

various kinds of connection and disconnection in their lives, over short or long periods of time, such as in their marital relationships, in their parent-child relationships, and in their relationships in Korean communities and Korean immigrant churches. However, the most powerful connection for almost all of the research partners occurred in their relationships with God. In the rest of this section, I will discuss my analysis of these research partners' connections and disconnections based on their shared experiences.

#### Dis/Connection in Kirogi Couple's Relationships

First, the research partners in this study presented various incidents in their couple relationships before and during their Kirogi living arrangement. Family separation and the geographical, physical, and emotional distances in their Kirogi living arrangements have created experiences of connection or disconnection in their couple relationships. Despite several years of separation, ten of the research partners shared that they have maintained stable couple relationships and even experienced improved relationship. The longer conversations with her husband than when they lived together regularly quality-based conversation contributed to their connection. Miller and Stiver have pointed out that not sharing every moment but rather, the important parts of our experiences makes people connected.<sup>410</sup> They overcame the geographical distance between them and their husband by making an effort to share their thoughts and feelings by using modern technology. It would not have happened if there were not modern technology usage. Likewise, modern technology contributes to enhancing the connection in the relationships of most of the Kirogi couples in this study. They have a lot more conversations with their spouses via phone, webcam, and group chatting. For these ten Kirogi couples, the

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<sup>410</sup> Miller and Stiver, *Healing Connection*, 43-44.

transnational arrangement has been an opportunity to enhance their connections.

However, strictly speaking, I cannot assert that the ten research partners who experienced more stable relationships have experienced mutual emotional connection, because some of the research partners and their husbands still insisted on their own way and did not make room for their spouses' differing opinions. They simply might fight less over minor things and have less opportunities to react to their husbands' non-responsive behaviors. Nonetheless, it is interesting to discover that the quiet husbands had to talk through the webcam or telephone, which helped the couple's emotional sharing. Thus, the Kirogi living arrangement challenges Kirogi fathers to break from the traditional way Korean men communicate and become more expressive. Overall, it is encouraging that the Kirogi couples are at least beginning a practice of emotional sharing that may continue after the Kirogi living arrangement ends, if they can remain open to changing their patterns of relating.

In regard to disconnection, some of the research partners had already experienced severe disconnections in their relationships with their husbands before they entered into the Kirogi living arrangement. Their hidden reason for deciding to come to the U.S. was to escape from their hurtful relationships with their husbands. It was hard for these women to experience mutual relationships with their husbands. Thus, they chose a justified separation in the name of their children's education. One research partner did not want to get a divorce due to different life patterns culturally imposed. Her husband put many restrictions on her while he enjoyed his free life in Korea. Although she did not choose divorce, there still was no way of establishing connection with her husband after coming to the U.S. However, she said that it is really comfortable living in the U.S.

because he is not around and she is able to live according to her own decisions. However, another research partner has not given up hope and believes this period of time away from her husband can heal their relationship despite her escape from the relationship.

Some research partners still experience a lack of emotional connection with their husband, although they recognize the value of their husband's role in providing for the practical needs of their family's daily life in the U.S. Whenever their husband visits, they try to make their families' lives more comfortable. However, the wives and the children do not appreciate them because that is not what they want. It is their own way of demonstrating love. Instead, these Kirogi mothers want them to spend time with their children and to share in their troubles by listening and talking to them.

As mentioned, the purpose of these women's decisions to enter into a Kirogi living arrangement was to avoid divorce while engaging in a justifiable separation. This is called "healthy disconnection" in RCT. The Kirogi living arrangement protects them and saves their marital relationship, because they do not give up maintaining their marriage. It seems beneficial not only for Kirogi mothers but also for Kirogi husbands. Thus, temporary disconnection becomes an opportunity to restore a couple's relationship. Otherwise, they would be totally disconnected. As a result of transnational separation, Kirogi wives become more understanding of their husbands and come to know that their husbands love their families. However, based on what they reported, their husbands do not seem to know how to express their thoughts and feelings to their family members. Their expressions of love are exhibited through silence or by providing for only the practical needs of their families, but these actions are usually not recognized by family members as expressions of love. Likewise, non-expressiveness in communication or non-

mutuality in power imbalances are likely to produce misunderstanding, suffering, or impasses in couples' relationships, even though they love each other, and may finally lead to disconnection.

Two research partners shared their experiences of total disconnection in their couple relationships during their Kirogi living arrangements. One research partner's husband suddenly left for Korea and did not come back, leaving her and her children in the U.S. She felt betrayed and closed her heart totally for several years. In the case of another research partner, her husband asked her for a divorce because she did not follow his order to return to Korea, which he gave because he was unable to financially support his family in the U.S. Instead, she chose to stay in the U.S. and support herself. Her decision not to follow her husband's order was at the expense of total disconnection. This disconnection also reveals power differential between husband and wife and the less power cannot produce change that led to disconnection. In sum, these women's experiences of disconnection in couple relationship are closely related to Confucian cultural values or patriarchal structure of family. Likewise, power differentials in relationships cause disconnection. In RCT, power is regarded as the capacity to produce change. However, in these cases, some research partners acted out their needs against the dominant persons but not accepted. Thus, their decision to enter into Kirogi living arrangement mitigated these power imbalance makes them empowered. However, it is not known if they came to know the reason why their wives were suffering.

In discussing these research partners' experiences of disconnection in their couple relationships, it becomes evident that their husbands' hierarchical ways of relating and inequality in couple relationships contributes to disconnection. These couple relationships

are based on the traditional Korean patriarchal structure. According to RCT, the imbalance of power between men and women does not support the development of mutual empathy and empowerment.<sup>411</sup> Hence, some research partners' choice of disconnection has given their husbands opportunities to realize how their ways of relating were hurtful, and it has also led to the women becoming aware of how much and in what ways their husbands love them. Therefore, their choice of disconnection has become a transition toward connection. For these Kirogi mothers, transnational separation has been a good way to stay in an in-between space and delay their final choice of divorce. As a result, most of their relationships have been restored, although they still are not based on mutual emotional connection and openness to change. As indicated, some of the husbands' nonverbal messages or silence in communication does not seem helpful, even though they love their wives deep inside. The stories of the research partners imply that, while the Confucian value system has not considered expressiveness important, verbal communication is helpful at least to some extent in enhancing couples' relationships.

There are also cases that Kirogi couples experienced the increased disconnection after their transnational separation. Some of the research partners' experience of disconnection is attributed to several factors, such as physical distance, a cultural gap, and different values. The first contributing factor is due to a lack of spending time together and a lack of physical proximity, when these couples need each other's comfort and support emotionally and physically. Three of the research partners stated that, during their Kirogi living arrangement, their husbands have not shown any sexual interest toward them, and this has caused them to feel a lack of intimacy and to suspect their

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<sup>411</sup> Miller and Stiver, *Healing Connection*, 37.

husbands are having extramarital affairs. One research partner reported that there was no sexual intimacy in her marital relationship even before the separation. Another research partner reported that it is hard for her to control her sexual needs, but her husband does not respond to her advances. In the case of a third research partner, she was suspicious of her husband and thus had to give up her sexual desires. She had a hard time trusting her husband and prayed to God a lot to give her a trusting mind with no doubts. These examples suggest that physical intimacy is important for couples to experience connection, and they suffer when they cannot communicate about their physical desires. According to Miller, when women have acted out of their own interests and motivation, it has been regarded as destructively aggressive, therefore, many women remain voiceless.<sup>412</sup> She argues that expressing of physical desires does not mean losing their femininity. When women try to use power, they become fearful, as if they are losing their core sense of identity and femininity.

On the other hand, for some research partners, the lack of common things to talk about in her conversations with their husband has contributed to their emotional disconnection in their couple relationship. When the two of them talk about things related to where they are living, they cannot relate to each other: Kirogi mothers usually tell their husbands about the American education system, but they do not understand, since it is new to them. When the husbands share what has happened in Korea, the wives do not connect with it, either. This is the reason why these Kirogi mothers feel that they are losing prime time in their married life because they feel a lack of intimacy with their

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<sup>412</sup> Jean Baker Miller, "Women and Power," 197-205.



husbands. These research partners regret from time to time that they and their husband are losing common themes to share and they are becoming distant.

Another element that contributes to increased disconnection is marital conflicts, because both husband and wife want to be compensated by their partners for their struggles and suffering. Some research partners shared that their husbands want to show how they have had a hard time in Korea without their families and that they feel lonely. On the flip side, these research partners also want to be relieved of all their hard chores and want their husbands to help them. Thus, they have continuously fought over unnecessary things, and many times their husbands have gone back to Korea without reconciliation between them. When they resolve their conflicts successfully, they maintain their connection; otherwise, they come to experience temporary disconnection. In the latter case, sometimes, it lasts long or they do not have time to share their emotions, so that their relationships are becoming distant. According to RCT, a lack of conflict resolution or avoiding conflicts thwarts authenticity and can lead to increasing emotional disconnection.

In this respect, the Kirogi mothers in my study need to be courageous enough to open their minds, to communicate regarding their conflicts, and to demonstrate understanding of their partners' experiences and perspectives. The tendency not to share their differing opinions or disagreements seems to come from religious and cultural values that are disapproving of the expression of personal needs and of familial conflicts. Korean culture emphasizes maintaining relationships and the harmony and integrity of the family, even if it is personally costly. However, one-way efforts to maintain harmony do not create real harmony. Both parties need to open their hearts and share their minds.

The tendency to avoid conflicts also contributes to some of the Kirogi couples' fears of reunion. Almost half of the research partners have become comfortable living without their husbands, because separation has meant a lack of conflict, and this lifestyle has supported the women's patterns of conflict avoidance. Reunion means facing conflicts or the potential for conflicts again.

If a pastoral counselor has an opportunity to engage with a couple who are about to be reunited, it is important to let them explore their complaints and fears, to help them be vulnerable and open up to one another, and to have them openly talk about their fears in relation to what they think it will be like once they are living together again. Verbal communication is important in the process of sharing their feelings and thoughts in order to resolve their conflicts. Janet Surrey asserts that "mutuality describes a creative process, in which openness to change allows something new to happen, building on the different contributions of each person."<sup>413</sup> The focus of such communication, then, is on mutual empathy and the mutual enhancement of one another.

On the other hand, more than half of the research partners shared how they overcame their disconnections through the Kirogi living arrangement. Their trusting relationships with their husbands have helped them maintain their marital relationships in positive ways and made them feel connected. Therefore, while mutual emotional sharing is the most important factor in maintaining a sense of connection with another person, other factors contribute as well. For these research partners, trust and commitment played the role of a buffer that prevented disconnection, which occurs when emotional sharing is not possible. Since they were living at long distances from their husbands and were

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<sup>413</sup> Miller and Stiver, *Healing Connection*, 43.

separated for several years, trust and commitment were important to sustaining their relationships. In addition, as discussed earlier, their sexual intimacy was an important factor for maintaining their connection. In sum, for Kirogi mothers in this study to experience connection in their couple relationships, physical intimacy, trust, commitment, faith in God, and emotional sharing were important factors.

According to the narratives of many of the Kirogi mothers in this study, the experience of disconnection has arisen not only with their husbands but also with their in-laws. Some Kirogi mothers' mother-in-laws used to make decisions for their daughter-in-laws and ordered them around, and cultural mores told their daughter-in-laws that they had to obey her mother-in-law's commands without question. In this case, the Kirogi mothers feel free from having to deal with their in-laws while they were living in the U.S. These Kirogi mothers experienced great stress in their relations with their in-laws in Korea, which created disconnections in those relationships. Three research partners had recently decided not to go back to Korea because it would be hard for her to deal with the interference of her in-laws; it was much more pleasant for her to live without her in-laws involved in her life. One research partner shared that she was tired of frequent criticism from her mother-in-law. This authority of parents-in-law is attributed to Confucian cultural values. Likewise, it is shown that when parents-in-law use their authority to interfere in their sons' marital relationships, daughters-in-law cannot enjoy private lives. The cultural values that emphasize obedience to their parents-in-law are still prevalent in Korean society and seem to affect the lives of Kirogi mothers continuously. Therefore, even if they did not intentionally choose to avoid these conflicts, these women's disconnections from their in-laws gave them freedom. This form of disconnection is

called “healthy disconnection” because it protects the women from endless suffering.

Healthy disconnection is for proper self-protection and discernment of when it is safe to be open to others.<sup>414</sup>

#### Dis/Connection is Parent-Child Relationships

Most of Kirogi fathers in my study were usually busy in their works in Korea, therefore, they had no time to spend together with his family. However, after Kirogi living arrangement, some fathers experienced more connections while others faced more disconnections. . Ironically, some Kirogi fathers became closer to their children due to spending more time together although they are separated each other. Despite physical distance, they used modern technology such as email, instant messaging, and video-conferencing facilitated communication and shared their lives which lead to emotional connection. For some of the Kirogi fathers who were not accustomed to verbal conversations face to face, the use of communication technologies provided new ways to relate. These fathers try to support their children with warm and encouraging words and try to understand their children’s mistakes. Some of them also schedule time to spend together with their children through traveling, playing sports, visiting museums, and having fun experiences whenever they visit. These Kirogi fathers seemed to be able to maintain mutual relationships with their children and experience more connection.

On the other hand, other Kirogi fathers experienced intensified disconnections in their relationships with their children when the separation continued for more than four or five years. Their children’s newly acquired cultural differences caused them to face more

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<sup>414</sup> Judith V. Jordan, “Relational Awareness: Transforming Disconnection,” in *The Complexity of Connection*, eds. Judith V. Jordan, Maureen Walker, and Linda Hartling (New York: Guilford Press, 2004), 47-63.

conflicts. These fathers are typical traditional father types who live according to traditional Confucian values. They have strict attitudes toward their children. For example, Lisa's children have a difficult time talking with their father due to his authoritarian approach. These fathers seem to be embarrassed but do not want change their patterns of communication. Some fathers are upset at their children's expressiveness. As they have grown up, the children have rebelled against their father's authoritarianism. Observing the disconnection between their children and husbands, some research partners have tried to mediate between them, asking their children to obey their fathers' guidance and to respect them, but this does not work well. In these cases, Kirogi fathers do not seem to understand or attempt to understand or learn about cultural differences, instead insisting on a hierarchical parent-children relationship. Thus, the previous cases in which the fathers do not seem strict and are flexible present more possibilities for connection. According to RCT, one of the obstacles to relational competence is oppression by dominant groups who appear non-responsive.

In relation to experiences of disconnection, Miller and Stiver assert that mutuality does not mean equality, nor is it a matter of reciprocity, because each person has a different level of empathic ability based on her/his age and experience. Rather, mutuality means that each person in a relationship can be fully engaged in a shared activity.<sup>415</sup> This implies that Kirogi fathers need to consider opening their minds to listen to their children, so they can influence and be influenced by their children. Although their children are young, the fathers need to be open to accept their opinions and to trying to share their thoughts and feelings. However, Korean fathers can be vulnerable without

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<sup>415</sup> Miller and Stiver, *Healing Connection*, 43-44.

losing the rights they have in a hierarchical relationship with their children. Instead, they tend to focus on what is right or wrong and do not try to engage with their children. Without empathic attunement to each other's implicit messages, these fathers and children will remain disconnected. Thus, these Kirogi fathers need to acknowledge their vulnerability and learn to be more emphatic.

Not only Kirogi fathers but also Kirogi mothers face connections and disconnections in their relationships with their children, due to several reasons. Their relationships with their children also changed. Similar to the Kirogi fathers' cases, some research partners rigidly pressure their children to follow Korean cultural mores, so they have a hard time and experienced increased disconnections with them. Some Kirogi mothers do not accept their children's differing opinions which may have sounded reasonable to other people. Although their opinions are not as strong as their husbands' they would raise their voices to their children to obey. As similar to previous cases, since a hierarchical relationship does not allow for mutuality, these mothers cannot engage with their children about the important parts of their experiences, so children do not learn their own feelings and thoughts.

Some other research partners have taken a middle ground. The conflicting values between Americanized children and Kirogi mothers who have traditional values contribute to continuous tensions in Kirogi families. When they have recognized that their children are gaining new cultural values, some Kirogi mothers have tried to accept them by respecting their children's privacy and ways of communicating. While these Kirogi mothers are tied to their traditional values, they seem more open to accepting the new cultural values of their children and more resilient, which leads to connection.

However, in reflecting on RCT, their taking a middle position is not based on mutual empathy but on a one-way understanding. These mothers have become vulnerable to their children because their cultural gap may contribute to the breakdown of harmony in their families. Thus, the accommodations they have made for their children seem more like their way of maintaining harmony and peace in the family. I would suggest that they need to reveal their thoughts to their children to find a way to resolve their differences, showing respect while not simply accepting their children's viewpoints.

To the main point, the strong focus of most of the research partners on their role as educational manager also deters emotional connection with their children. As already discussed, when these Kirogi mothers insist on their perspective, it contributes to disconnection. The role of educational manager itself reflects that the family structure is role-based. When this role is exercised with mutual understanding, children feel supported, but when Kirogi mothers are too obsessed about their children's academic grades, their children seem to become disobedient. This gradually causes disconnection. One research partner's son is really grateful for her support for his academic achievement while other children resisted their mothers' interference to their lives.

#### Dis/Connection in Korean Communities and Korean Immigrant Churches

The research partners have not only experienced connection and disconnection in their relationships with their family members, but also they have experienced them in their Korean communities and Korean immigrant churches as well as in the mainstream of U.S. culture. First, several research partners presented their experiences of disconnection from American society. Some experience isolation from the dominant culture because they spend all their time in a Korean community. It is hard for them in

adjusting to a new culture due to language barriers and cultural differences which have caused them to feel disconnected from American society. On the other hand, one research partner rather actively pursues connection with her new culture by making American friends and enjoying casual conversations with the people around her.

Even Korean communities and Korean immigrant churches are also places where most of the research partners have experienced short- or long-term disconnections. Many research partners revealed that they experienced feelings of marginality and loneliness in their churches. Some of them have a fear of being gossiped about and thus have found it difficult to approach other church members. Due to social prejudices and stigma toward Kirogi mothers, they become vulnerable and self-conscious about being viewed as a woman living apart from her husband. It makes some of them passive or isolated. Whenever, they face social bias, they become angry, anxious, vulnerable, sad, and depressed. Due to becoming an object of prejudice and envy, some Kirogi mothers shared that their experience of loneliness and isolation in the Korean community and in the Korean immigrant church is one of the biggest challenges for them. These prejudices are also attributed to Korean Confucian values.

Some research partners experienced disconnection even in the small group. One research partner shared her uneasiness in a small group with couples and became withdrawn and eventually silent. Her interpersonal relationships were diminished, and she gradually became disconnected from her church. Some other Kirogi mothers were not always comfortable or not able to be authentic, even in the small groups for single women, such as divorcees who have a hard time financially and emotionally. They hid their worries and feelings, such as missing their husbands, because they did not want to



hurt the single women. They also became cautious because they found that even small group members talked badly about them out of jealousy. On the other hand, some research partners opposed even the idea that there should be a Kirogi mothers' meeting at their church, because not all Kirogi mothers are in the same situation, and some of them would be marginalized even in that group. In sum, withdrawing from social activities due to prejudices, envy, and gossip in the church and not being able to be authentic contributed to experiences of disconnection for Kirogi mothers in Korean immigrant communities and churches.

One research partner is currently fully disconnected from the outside world, being totally absorbed in taking care of her children. In light of RCT, her self-isolation is a strategy for survival.<sup>416</sup> She becomes lonely because she tries to avoid those who keep violating her private life in the United States. She cries out to God to not let others bother her. In Korea, she had already experienced disconnection from her mother-in-law, who is a sincere Christian but kept criticizing her. She got hurt whenever she was with her and she was also hurt by her close friends when she spent time with them in the U.S. She said that she usually does not like going to meetings and hates visits from church members. As RCT illustrates, this woman's strategy of disconnection is intended to avoid getting hurt by others, but she actually yearns for connection. Therefore, the church needs to be patient and leave her alone, so she does not feel more violated by others.

While some research partners experienced disconnection in Korean communities and Korean immigrant churches, other research partners experienced connection. When the church provided a family-like atmosphere and church members greeted the Kirogi

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<sup>416</sup> Miller and Stiver, *Healing Connection*, 105.

mothers kindly, they felt accepted and comforted. Because church members genuinely wanted to help, these research partners were able to adjust well. In particular, for most of the research partners in this study, weekly small groups for Bible study helped them experience connection. The small groups provided them with an opportunity for social interaction and making friends. In the groups, they could deal with their emotional difficulties and share their lives. Most Kirogi mothers in this study attended small groups that consisted of single women. As de facto single mothers, they shared commonalities with the members of these groups and experienced mutual empathy with them. Some research partners revealed that they were able to comfortably open up and share everything with others in their small groups. Others shared that small group members are like family: they get together for the Korean Thanksgiving and other major holidays and celebrate together, and these events are like family gatherings. For the research partners who belong to small groups for Kirogi mothers, the groups were a perfect fit for them, as all of the members are in similar situations—having flexible time and a comfortable lifestyle—and they feel understood and connected in these groups.

The case of one research partner is unique. Her relationship with a special person enabled her to overcome her past experiences of multiple disconnections and to experience a new connection. After experiencing disconnection in her previous church, she moved to a new church and met a pastor's wife who was open-minded and patient until the research partner felt comfortable joining in the activities of the congregation. This Kirogi mother experienced a new connection in her relationship with this pastor's wife as they shared their thoughts and feelings with each other. For her, this woman is the only one she has ever really felt connected with, because she did not have friends in

Korea or in the U.S. This relationship has opened her heart to God, and she has become active in the church and confident. As Miller says, her new being-in-relationship seems to be ushering in the beginning of a sense of self who is accepted and understood by another.

Ultimately, most of the research partners in this study experienced connection in their Korean immigrant churches, probably because there were no other suitable places for them to engage in social interactions. Although some experienced disconnection at first, they experienced more and more connection as time went on and they became accustomed to the church atmosphere and joined groups such as choir, welcoming committee, and Bible study. When they decided to join in church activities, they became more confident and alive. In these ways, Korean immigrant churches are places that connect these Kirogi mothers to other people and to God.

#### Dis/Connection in Relationship with God

Up to this point, I have discussed how my research partners have experienced multiple connections and disconnections before and during their Kirogi living arrangements. However, the most remarkable thing is their experience of new connection in their relationship with God. This new connection was experienced by most of the research partners and contributed to their stability in Kirogi living. Although RCT does not include a relationship with the divine in defining connection, one can infer that these women's sharing of authentic feelings and thoughts with God helped them feel understood and empowered. I believe that experiences of disconnection with people caused them to yearn more for connection with God.

For many research partners, their spiritual lives became the meaning of Kirogi living for them. They regarded their Kirogi living as a difficult time in their lives.

However, for some, it has been a revival time, both emotionally and spiritually. They have gotten to know who God is and realized how much He loves them. Whenever they have felt let down, God has given them the strength to stand up again. Some women have been unsure whether they made the right decision, although they are satisfied with their Kirogi living arrangement because of their children's education. However, since they and their families are very well off spiritually, they do not regret it. One research partner, who believed she failed due to her children's poor academic achievements, confessed that the only thing she gained through coming to the U.S. was God.

In other cases, new connection in relationship with God transformed the research partners' self-identities. In particular, some research partners overcame their identity confusion through their relationship with God during their time of Kirogi living. They asked themselves from time to time who they were and what they were doing in this foreign country. God's nonjudgmental attitude made them aware that they are accepted as they are and that God has a clear plan for them. Thus, they discovered their genuine selves, and their mutual relationships with God enabled them to move out of their previous identities and to gain new ones. For some of them, only God understood them and listened to them. In relation to this, they found that their pursuits were not what their genuine selves wanted. During this process of self-realization, some of them discovered that they were oppressed by their husbands, and they came to have the courage to oppose their husbands' opinions or orders with confidence. Kirogi living and becoming free from their false selves became an opportunity for them to find their autonomy and self-identity. These women's processes of growth and self-realization reveal how patriarchal influences have affected these women's connections and disconnections. Through their

growth in relationship with God, they have found new meaning in their lives. They have been empowered and have come to have the courage to deal with their difficult situations.

This indicates that Korean immigrant churches should be places that provide Kirogi mothers with comfort and social networks, and they should be prepared for Kirogi mothers' spiritual growth in many ways. Especially, Bible study helped them gain new knowledge of God and deepened their faith. Bora described her experience of God's love through relationships with members of her church. Likewise, for some of the women, the experience of authentic relationship with others led to their regaining their relationship with God. As already shared, one of the research partner's new connection to a pastor's wife enhanced her relationship with God. On the contrary, another Kirogi mother's disconnection with her mother-in-law negatively affected her connection with other people and God. In sum, the Kirogi mothers in my study experienced connection to God through prayer, Bible reading, and interaction with small group members at church. Their narratives suggest that knowledge of God and genuine relationships with others help them to connect with God.

It is noteworthy that, for most of the research partners, connection to God enabled them to overcome their experiences of multiple disconnections. Many research partners described experiences of disconnection in their relationships with their children, husbands, in-laws, and people in their Korean communities and Korean immigrant churches that were mitigated or transformed. Their connection with God changed them in many ways. According to RCT, connection consists of five good things: "zest, action, knowledge, worth, and desire for more connection."<sup>417</sup> As those who experienced new

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<sup>417</sup> Miller and Stiver, *Healing Connection*, 24-41.

connection with people and God described this experience, they shared that they felt more “energy” through emotional joining and were able to “act” within their relationships. They came to “know” themselves and their families better, along with the world around them, and they learned why they experience particular feelings and thoughts in certain situations. When they felt acknowledged, they were then able to develop a “sense of worth.”<sup>418</sup> Some of them experienced freedom from various kinds of restrictions and legalistic religious beliefs. As a result, some research partners felt more concern and care for others and were eager for more connections.

#### Evaluation of RCT in the Korean Context

RCT seems fit well with Korean Christian Kirogi mothers’ experiences in terms of connection and disconnection, mutuality, and authenticity. I have chosen relational-cultural theory because this theory allows room to reflect on the role of Korean cultural values and Christian values in the stories of the Korean Christian Kirogi mothers whom I interviewed. It also describes some of the sources of Korean Kirogi mothers’ suffering and of their courage to overcome their difficulties. As many research partners shared, how they suffered during the time of disconnection in various relationships. On the other hand, when they chose “healthy disconnection” they are free from their culturally imposed roles they feel freedom and enjoy their life. It shows that how cultural values impact one’s connection and disconnection in relationship.

However, RCT seems to create a dualism between the two concepts of connection and disconnection. The research partners’ narratives suggest that there are middle grounds between their experiences of connection and disconnection, and sometimes there

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<sup>418</sup> Miller and Stiver, *Healing Connection*, 24-41.

may not be a clear-cut experience of connection or disconnection. Some of the Kirogi fathers still do not want to engage in emotional sharing in their verbal conversations, but their consistently caring attitudes toward their wives, by supporting them financially and practically, are evidence to their wives that they love them. So, even if their communication is not mutual, they experience improvement and connection in their marital relationships. Further, their experiences of healthy disconnection seem too complicated to be explained by RCT. While RCT discusses healthy disconnection as a way of protecting oneself, some of the research partners' choices of disconnection are more likely to heal relationships than protect the Kirogi mothers themselves. Therefore, their choices of disconnection have become transitions toward connection and reflect an active attitude rather than passive. This is because these Kirogi mothers pursue harmony, based on their cultural values, rather than mutual emotional connection. There are other factors that affect these Kirogi mothers' connections in their couple relationships in addition to mutual emotional connection, such as physical proximity, commitment, trust, and faith in God.

While the emphasis of RCT is on mutual empathy, from the perspective of these Kirogi mothers' lives, RCT is still individualistic and too much of an ideal to reach in a short time because of their collective mindset. While relational cultural theory stresses connection rather than separateness and autonomy, developing autonomy was found to be important for some of the Kirogi mothers in order for them to sustain themselves in their Kirogi living arrangement.

In light of these Kirogi mothers' narratives, it is found that even one experience of connection in relationship with anyone can empower their future relationships and

transform their strategies for disconnection. Even if the Kirogi mothers in my study primarily experienced disconnections in their familial and other relationships, the experience of a new connection to God enabled them to overcome their experiences of multiple disconnections and often helped them to connect with others better.

Finally, although Jordan focuses on relationship in community suggesting a mutual forming process of self and others but still it seems how the individual can achieve a great goal, and does not include communal care. Therefore, in the next section, not only individual care but communal care for these Kirogi mothers will be discussed from feminist practical theological perspectives.

#### Discussion of Findings through the Lenses of Feminist Practical Theology

Feminist pastoral theology deals with women's stories and articulates a theology of women's experiences. In this study, Korean Christian Kirogi mothers' experiences are primary and authoritative in building a framework of pastoral theology. To understand Kirogi mothers' lives and interconnections in their living webs, a feminist perspective needs to first take into account the sociocultural influences on their lives. Thus, the experiences of the research partners in connection with family members, other people, society, and churches will be examined. As I investigated the adjustment of Korean Kirogi mothers, the rising issues were deeply associated with relationality: the women's relationships with family members, other people, and God. For Neuger, relationality has many layers in feminist thought, and it has served as both a tool for oppression and for empowerment. In this respect, the relationality of the Kirogi mothers whom I interviewed will be examined in terms of oppression, liberation, and empowerment.



Neuger states that relationality is the core concept in pastoral theology.<sup>419</sup>

According to her, relationality has been a focus of women's psychology, feminist ethics, and feminist theology. She uses the term *relationality* instead of *relationships* because she wants focus on the origin, function, nature, and role of relationships and relating in women's lives through a gendered lens. Neuger describes three foci for relationality in feminist theories and theologies: (1) women's relationality as uniquely gendered; (2) the just and mutually enhancing ordering of relationships; and (3) theological understandings of relationship in the web of creation.<sup>420</sup> She argues that relational justice, ethical obligations of relationality, and interdependence are necessary components of pastoral theology because relationality has been used as a tool of oppression.<sup>421</sup>

John Patton describes relationality theologically: God's image is seen in relationality and in the responsibility of responding to God through care for self and others.<sup>422</sup> For him, God is the author of community and made community for human relationality, which can be empowered through mutual relationships with others and with God. Human beings are created as relational beings in order to experience relationship that empowers ministry. The church exists to offer genuine relationships and to enable people to discover meaning in life. Patton states that if pastoral care does not consider contexts, it offers a narrow paradigm. Thus, he asserts that pastoral care should take into account multiple contexts, such as gender and race. For him, gender issues are always

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<sup>419</sup> Neuger, "Women and Relationality," 115-119.

<sup>420</sup> Neuger, "Women and Relationality," 115-119.

<sup>421</sup> Ramsay, "Contemporary Pastoral Theology," 160-166.

<sup>422</sup> John Patton, *Pastoral Care in Context: An Introduction to Pastoral Care* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 19-49.

present in any significant relationship, and people have inherited issues that affect how they deal with issues they encounter in their own lives.<sup>423</sup>

The intent of this work is to listen to the stories and concerns of Kirogi mothers, with their invisible and silent suffering, and to examine how patriarchy affects Korean women's physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being. Not only Confucian influences but also the stresses that accompany acculturation in the U.S. should be taken into account. These are both sources of oppression and marginalization. The Kirogi mothers I interviewed presented multiple voices in their roles as mothers and wives and as members of Korean communities and Korean immigrant churches. Based on their narratives, it will be helpful to analyze the multiple dynamics of their relationships with self, family, and organizations through the lenses of theologies of self-sacrifice and marginality. The results of these analyses will provide ideas for not only individual care but also communal care, liberation, and transformation.

#### Theological Perspectives of Self-Sacrifice

John Stott states that agape love includes the elements of sacrifice and service, and "agape is the sacrifice of self in the service of another."<sup>424</sup> He asserts that false self-sacrifice is actually self-service and love of the false self. This self-love is the biblical concept of sin. The temptation toward self-love is due to humans still having the image of God, despite their fallenness. For Stott, when we truly deny or sacrifice ourselves, it will lead to true self-discovery. Thus, true self-denial means denying our false self in Adam

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<sup>423</sup> Patton, *Pastoral Care in Context*, 19-49.

<sup>424</sup> John R. W. Stott, "Must I Really Love Myself?" *Christianity Today* 5 (May 1978), 33-34.

and affirming our true self in Christ. Then we can love Christ, who redeemed us, and our neighbor for His sake, since we have become free from loving our false selves.<sup>425</sup>

Similarly, Philip Culbertson argues that self-sacrifice means sacrifice of one's true self, but false self-sacrifice is no different from selfishness and ultimately becomes manipulation of other people.<sup>426</sup> Because self-sacrifice is one of the many roles and expectations of Confucian family members, traditional Korean family systems struggle in order to maintain a safe power balance in the family. Self-sacrifice is a role that women bear disproportionately in patriarchal cultures, and the expectation of self-sacrifice has been transmitted from generation to generation. However, when sacrifices are not voluntarily made, although self-sacrifice is regarded as a Christian virtue, it can be destructive of the self and identity. This involuntary self-sacrifice disempowers and leads to destructive distortions in social interactions. For Philip Culbertson, selfishness and self-sacrifice are no different.<sup>427</sup>

Gill-Austern challenges the equation of Christian love with self-sacrifice, self-denial, and self-abnegation as being dangerous to women's physical, psychological, and spiritual health.<sup>428</sup> However, for her, self-sacrifice is not always harmful to human relationships. Rather, it is an essential element of authentic love. Drawing on the image of the Trinity, she emphasizes divine love as "a total and mutual self-giving," not self-sacrifice. The Trinity demonstrates mutual self-giving and teaches us that wholeness comes from mutual relationships; it is not achieved on one's own. For her, self-giving is

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<sup>425</sup> Stott, "Must I Really Love Myself?" 33-34.

<sup>426</sup> Philip Culbertson, *Caring for God's People: Counseling and Christian Wholeness* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000), 6-8.

<sup>427</sup> Culbertson, *Caring for God's People*, 6-8.

<sup>428</sup> Brita L. Gill-Austern, "Love Understood as Self-Sacrifice and Self-Denial: What Does It Do to Women?" in *Through the Eyes of Women: Insights for Pastoral Care*, ed. Jeanne Stevenson Moessner (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 304-321.

giving one's very fullness without domination. Women's strong tendency toward self-sacrifice contributes to insensitivity to their own needs and desires and to a loss of sense of self, voice, self-esteem, and capacity for genuine mutuality and intimacy. It results in feelings of resentment, bitterness, and anger. Therefore, as the Trinity models, women should be encouraged to have loving and just relationships with mutual self-giving and receiving.<sup>429</sup>

In relation to self-sacrifice in the Korean context, Christian teachings that equate Christian love with self-sacrifice have contributed to Korean Kirogi women's devotion to self-sacrifice. Therefore, because all the research partners in my study are Christian, their sacrificial love for their families has been reinforced by the patriarchal tendencies of Christianity in addition to Korean Confucianism. They have attempted to fulfill their culturally imposed roles as Korean women and the directives of Christian teachings on how to be loving. However, as suggested by Stott, Culbertson, and Gill-Austern, some Kirogi mothers' self-sacrifices are mostly at the expense of their personal needs and their true selves, and as a result, they unconsciously force their children to strive for goals that are solely their own. Furthermore, their self-sacrifices are connected with a lack of mutuality, justice, and intimacy in their relationships. However, many of these women came to discover their genuine selves and to love not only themselves but also others. Taking into consideration these understandings of self-sacrifice, the next subsection will present an analysis of my research partners' lives in more detail.

#### Kirogi Mothers' Family Dynamics

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<sup>429</sup> Gill-Austern, 304-320.

In this study, the research partners' narratives revealed their experiences of making multiple sacrifices to fulfill their roles as Korean mothers. Most of them indicated that they had sacrificed their needs in order to perform their roles as mothers before and during their Kirogi living arrangements. Their narratives imply that traditional Korean cultural influences, especially Confucian values, are embedded in their lives. The role of the contemporary Korean mother is a key element in understanding my research partners' decisions to enter into Kirogi living arrangements. The decision itself reflects multiple dynamics of Korean cultural values. According to Confucianism, Korean husbands support their families financially through working in the public domain, while Korean wives are responsible for the domestic domain and childcare. As reviewed in Chapter One, the responsibility for children's education has been transferred from fathers to mothers in contemporary society.

One of the sacrifices some of the research partners made as mothers was to give up their careers for the Kirogi living arrangement. A few shared that they felt they had to quit their jobs after seeing their children's poor academic grades in Korea. In the contemporary family system, each member has a distinctive role designed to help the family fulfill its collective goal. For these mothers, their children's poor grades were regarded as a failure on their part for not adequately performing their roles as mothers, so they believed that the Kirogi living arrangement was the only solution to the problem of their children's lack of academic success. One research partner closed her business in Korea in order to enter into Kirogi living; she is currently experiencing financial difficulties, which makes her regret her decision to leave her business. Similarly, another

research partner regrets her decision to come to the U.S. because she has lost a great amount of money on Kirogi living expenses.

In addition to these big sacrifices, all of the research partners reported that supporting their children's education took a lot of their energy and time in Korea. The mixture of the traditional mother's educational role, the government's policies, and the current Korean educational system caused them to step up their sacrifices. Many research partners did not want their children to study in the Korean educational system because it does not help children grow in all their abilities and they wanted to be free from its demanding environment. As one research partner indicated, Korean society makes Korean mothers drive themselves hard. Thus, for these research partners, the decision for the Kirogi living arrangement was an expression of hope that they would be released from their heavily burdened role as mothers in Korea. They were exhausted by the competitive Korean educational system and believed that studying abroad would be a better opportunity for their children's futures, including their quality of life. However, their decision also required a sacrifice on their behalf, a sacrifice of living in a foreign country at the expense of their needs and their marriage relationships. They believed that their sacrifices would contribute not only to their children's success but also to Korea's strength in a globalized world.

However, these Kirogi mothers do not seem aware of their mothering role as a sacrifice or an excessive sacrifice at the expense of their own needs, because the sacrificial role is unconsciously socially constructed. One Kirogi mother said, "I didn't think of it as a sacrifice. It's something I would surely do for my kids." The research partners' sacrifices continued or intensified during the Kirogi living arrangement. Several

research partners had a hard time due to their unstable legal status in the U.S. Five research partners received an F1 visa for the purpose of having legal resident status so their children could study in the U.S., but the visa requires them to be enrolled in a school; as a result, some of them are suffering from high tuition costs. Two research partners have to go back and forth two to four times a year because their visitor's visas expire after six months. In other cases, research partners reported feeling helpless or unable to support their children academically. One of them once experienced depression due to her children's poor academic achievement.

These Kirogi mothers' narratives display that their sacrifices, which are unconsciously reinforced by Korean cultural values, continue even after coming to the U.S., and they discourage the mothers' development of true selfhood. Their self-identities or senses of self have been defined by the consequences of their sacrifices. The Korean communal sense of connectedness causes Koreans to identify with others easily, so these women identify with their children and their successes and failures.<sup>430</sup> In their narratives, there is evidence that the research partners have experienced regrets, anger, helplessness, depression, and low self-esteem when their children have not met their expectations. Many women also feel they have failed when their children cannot get into a good college. These are characteristics of false self-sacrifice. For Stott, these women's sacrifices are not indicative of true self-sacrifice in service to another but of false self-sacrifice that deters true self-discovery. Their self-sacrifice can be attributed to an unconscious search for meaning through their children's achievements.

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<sup>430</sup> Byoung Lee, "Caring Self and Women's Self-Esteem: A Feminist's Reflection on Pastoral Care and Religious Education of Korean American Women," *Pastoral Psychology* 54, no. 4 (Mar 2006): 342-346.

Culbertson argues that this search reveals itself through manipulation of others. Gill-Austern would point out that these Kirogi mothers' sacrifices are not mutual or reciprocal but one-way. The lack of mutuality in sacrificial giving contributes to insensitivity to their own needs and desires. The Trinity model is a vision of how to accomplish wholeness in mutual relationships, but Kirogi mothers do not experience such fullness and power of authentic love in their family relationships.

For half of the research partners, their mothering role became heavier. Although they were removed from the societal pressures in Korea, they gained another burden as the head of their families. Thus, they have to play the roles of mother and father at the same time. Due to this added role and its responsibilities, some have changed their attitudes from being affectionate mothers to being strict father figures. In their minds, the role of the father is based on the traditional patriarchal man. One research partner reported that she controls her emotions too much and becomes judgmental because of her heavy responsibilities, which then causes conflicts in her relationships with her children, who resist her. When another research partner's son acted as if he were the father in the family, she disliked it and tried to recover the position of authority. For these women, being both father and mother is a double burden and puts a lot of pressure on them, so they still feel like they have to be supermoms. With this gender role change, when they are not resilient, they seem to experience disconnection with their children. This change also leads them to not be their authentic selves. Adding to the struggles with being both father and mother are the issues that arise from a lack of English proficiency. For two research partners, their lack of English abilities made them feel helpless because they were not able to assist their children with their studies. Several of the research



participants lamented that they have to rely on their children for many everyday transactions because they have a difficult time communicating in English. Thus, these women felt that their roles as mothers were diminished, and they felt they were losing authority over and respect from their children.

Another form of sacrifice, a lack of time for personal pursuits, seemed to affect the research participants' sense of self as well. They could not afford to enjoy a culturally rich life as they did in Korea, and this felt very limiting to them. Lacking the daily assistance of their husbands, some of the women sacrificed much of their time and energy to take care of their children, so they did not have time or energy left over for self-enrichment. Jisoo expressed that she feels incompetent in the U.S., and there are not many things she can do by herself. These research partners' sacrificial love seems to contribute to their sense of inadequacy and deters mutual relationships with others and participation in social domains.<sup>431</sup>

On the other hand, several research partners reported that they had achieved their goals and expectations, since their children have adjusted well academically. One research partner said that her children love living in the U.S. and have thanked her for bringing them here. Likewise, some research partners stated that they are happy because they do not need to take care of their children academically here in the U.S. They are satisfied with their children's self-management and their emotional stability. They stated that their children would have never developed such independence in Korea. Their children's satisfaction with life in the U.S. is the most important factor in Kirogi mothers' decisions to continue living in the U.S., and their reflections reveal how Korean society

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<sup>431</sup> Jaeyeon Chung, "Our Stories, Our Lives," 52.

gives Korean students and their parents much grief. In the U.S., these children and their mothers are free from the competitiveness of Korean society. These observations once again reveal that Korean mothers' happiness depends on their children's successes or failures and their children's well-being and satisfaction with their lives.

### Kirogi Mothers' Marriage Relationships

Some of the research partners shared that the Kirogi living arrangement helped them escape from a marital relationship of suffering. Their husbands were typical traditional patriarchal Korean husbands who used to force them to live according to traditional values, including just staying at home. However, three of the research partners actively resisted their husbands' lack of care and authoritarian attitudes, which had persisted despite their wives' suffering. One research partner opposed her husband's continuous financial support of his family members without her consent. In spite of these women's resistance, their husbands did not respond or take any action to change. Since Confucianism contains no concepts of sin, forgiveness, mercy, or grace, Confucian men are free to be self-righteous and insensitive to the needs of others.<sup>432</sup> Thus, these wives became frustrated and felt stuck in relational impasses. When two of them decided to enter into a Kirogi living arrangement, their husbands asked them how they had failed as husbands. These women's narratives imply that they were suffering from hierarchical couple relationships, so they called up the courage to get out of their situations.

In addition to Confucian culture, patriarchal theologies contribute to the formation of one-way relationships and disconnection. Christianity intensified Confucian hierarchical traditions because it embodies patriarchal thinking and structures within

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<sup>432</sup> Bong Bae Park, "The Encounter of Christianity," 61-62.

itself. When theology regards the patriarchal system of the family as the order of creation and male authority as God's direction, it is oppressive.<sup>433</sup> This theology deprives women of opportunities for healthy self-development and empowerment. In addition, the Confucian emphasis on harmony in society, especially within the web of family relationships, was maintained in Korean Christianity.

However, my research participants' narratives imply that their husbands are also suffering due to their socially constructed roles. Feminist practical theology affirms the idea that not only women but also men can be victims of patriarchy. Neuger and Poling state that patriarchal systems have harmed both women and men through strict delineations of roles.<sup>434</sup> Men need to deal with the confusing and mixed messages of patriarchy about their identities as males so they can live as authentic persons in healthy community.<sup>435</sup> According to Neuger and Poling, men's concerns are usually related to work, which is what makes them most anxious, and they tend to have a single-minded focus on work as a source of meaning.<sup>436</sup> On top of this, they feel a demand to provide everything for their children. It is confusing for them to live as men in today's world, and they fear doing things wrongly. Yet, as Neuger and Poling observe, they do not want to open up and share their feelings and change.<sup>437</sup>

Korean men's identities are defined by how hard they work for their families and their country. However, many Korean men are not received well by their families due to

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<sup>433</sup> Stephen C. Barton, ed. *The Family in Theological Perspective* (Edinburgh, Great Britain: T & T Clark, 1996), 110.

<sup>434</sup> Christie Cozad Neuger and James Newton Poling, "Gender and Theology," in *The Care of Men*, eds. Christie Cozad Neuger and James Newton Poling (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 26-27.

<sup>435</sup> Neuger and Poling, "Gender and Theology," 42-44.

<sup>436</sup> Neuger, "Men's Issues in the Local Church: What Clergymen Have to Say," in Neuger and Poling, 51-67.

<sup>437</sup> Neuger, "Men's Issues," 51-67.

a lack of spending time together. Many research partners in this study revealed that their husbands always came home late and were only able to see their children sleeping at night. Some research partners' accounts indicate that they experienced a lack of emotional intimacy with their husbands before and during the Kirogi living arrangement. They shared that, although their husbands are emotional, they rarely express it and keep silent. These Kirogi mothers want emotional connection, but their husbands focus on supplying them with practical necessities. These examples reflect the reasons why these Kirogi couples have had conflicts: the Kirogi fathers have focused on their work, while the Kirogi mothers desire emotional connection. Socially imposed roles contribute to these couples' relational impasses.

For many Korean Kirogi couples, a lack of intimacy in their relationships continues into their Kirogi lifestyles. Although Kirogi wives are thankful for their loving husbands who send money, these women feel emotionally distant from them because they do not express their feelings and deep affection. According to Anderson, cultural expectations require men to suffer in silence and to not show pain because these are signs of vulnerability and weakness.<sup>438</sup> From childhood on, boys are not free to grieve and learn to hide their feelings of sadness, hurt, and fear. Due to such long-term repression of emotion, men often feel lonely and depressed, but they are unable to identify the sources of their suffering. Therefore, men come to have self-defeating strategies for connecting with others and hide themselves from further exposure to pain. They attempt to maintain their super-masculinity and autonomy, and they try to "fix" situations rather than become

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<sup>438</sup> Herbert Anderson, "Men and Grief; The Hidden Sea of Tears without Outlet," in *The Care of Men*, eds. Christie Cozad Neuger and James Newton Poling (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 210

emotionally involved.<sup>439</sup> Many Kirogi fathers avoid expressing themselves verbally, which contributes to a lack of intimacy in their relationships with their spouses. This might be due not only to patriarchal influences but also to a collective mindset within a cultural milieu in which expressing one's real thoughts and emotions is not considered virtuous. Kirogi husbands' emotional reticence contributes to the creation of conflicts with their wives in the United States.

Although the Kirogi fathers connected with this study have enough time to spend with their families when they visit them in the U.S., some of them do not know how to connect with their wives and children. Therefore, some families do not spend meaningful time together even when they are all physically together. Some research partners indicated that their children are accustomed to studying in their rooms when their fathers visit. In an attempt to connect, some Kirogi fathers work hard to spend time with their children by traveling, playing sports, and going out for dinner with them. However, while the fathers' busyness with work influenced the amount of time they spent with their families in Korea, children's busy schedules interfere with spending quality time with their fathers in the United States. This affects the level of intimacy between fathers and their children in the Kirogi situation. Quality time together and verbal communication are needed to build intimate relationships. Only a very few Kirogi fathers reportedly excel at listening to their children and empathizing with them. In these few cases, children prefer their fathers to their mothers.

For some Kirogi families, their separation is a time of learning or practicing how to communicate with family members. The Kirogi living arrangement has been an

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<sup>439</sup> Herbert Anderson, "Men and Grief," 210.

opportunity for some couples to have more verbal communication, which has improved their relationships. In these cases, the partners miss each other and acknowledge how family time together is important. In particular, these Kirogi fathers make an effort to spend time with their wives and children and to have long conversations through phone, e-mail, webcam, and so on. The experiences of these Kirogi couples indicate that nonverbal messages caused couples to misunderstand each other before, but, with the Kirogi living arrangement, they have to communicate verbally more, and this improves the quality of their relationships. Those who have open conversations are likely to have intimate family relationships, while those research partners who did not have in-depth conversations with their spouses reported that they do not have intimate couple relationships. Kirogi fathers who communicate verbally with their families are more open to mutual relationships and have more intimate relationships with their family members than those who do not. This demonstrates that, for these Kirogi fathers, the Kirogi living arrangement has been an opportunity to move out of their traditionally constructed roles, at least to some extent.

Not only do Kirogi fathers gain an opportunity to improve their family relationships, some of them benefit from the Kirogi living arrangement by enjoying their single lifestyles. In Korea, one research partner's husband was constantly trying to read her mind when she would press him to come home early. But in the Kirogi living arrangement, he can work as much as he wants, get together with friends, and enjoy leisure time, so he feels like he is on vacation. Another research partner felt that her husband was enjoying his single life too much, and this contributed to her fear of becoming emotionally distant from him. On the other hand, almost half of the research

partners indicated that they feared reuniting with their husbands because they, the wives, have experienced their single lives as comfortable and enjoyable.

### Experiences in Korean Communities and Korean Immigrant Churches

To this point, I have examined the various dynamics in my research partners' family relationships before and during the Kirogi living arrangement. Next, I will discuss their relational dynamics in Korean communities and Korean immigrant churches and reflect on them in terms of a theology of marginality. The journey of Kirogi mothers through the transitional time of moving to the U.S. causes them to feel that they do not belong anywhere. It leads to loneliness, suffering, and avoidance. This experience of marginality is due to family conflicts, rapid changes in environment, adjustment difficulties, economic hardships, racial discrimination, and so on. The Korean Kirogi mothers' experiences shared in this study can be understood in light of a theology of marginality. Their experiences of Kirogi living in the U.S. present both negative and positive aspects. I am going to deal with the negative sides of their experiences of marginality and suggest hope for a transformed reality based on Jung Young Lee's theology of marginality.

Theology of Marginality. Jung Young Lee defines marginality from negative and positive perspectives and elucidates a theology of marginality by creating an analogy with Jesus Christ.<sup>440</sup> For Lee, Jesus was born as a marginal person and experienced life-long marginality, not only in his country but also in the cosmos. Jesus' incarnation was divine marginalization: God emptied the divine nature into human form, thereby entering the margin of marginality by giving up everything He had. Without emptying Himself,

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<sup>440</sup> Jung Young Lee, *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 72-95

incarnation could not have occurred. Jesus experienced loneliness and suffering because he was rejected by his people and the world. He endured the crucifixion without resistance because it was an act of love. Lee claims that the crucifixion of Jesus was for marginalized people, not for those living at the center of society. Jesus transcended marginality through resurrection. For God, the real center is the creative core, which is the margin of marginality. Accordingly, the followers of Jesus are the new marginal people of God. Lee asserts that liberation means “to transfer from the marginality of human centrality to the new marginality of divine presence in the world.”<sup>441</sup>

For Lee, the church is the community of God’s marginal people and is conscious of Christ’s presence in their midst.<sup>442</sup> Marginalized people easily become conscious of Christ’s presence and become new marginal people, while central people unconsciously avoid the presence of Christ by distancing themselves from the margins. The center of centrality is the church that is based on a hierarchical structure of belief and excludes the margins. For Lee, centralism is the cardinal sin of humankind. However, church tradition and theological teachings support this central ideology of power and dominance. Lee contends that this way is inappropriate for Eastern people. In this regard, Kirogi are on the margins of the marginalized. They do not belong to American or Korean American cultures.

The church as marginal community requires a structure in which every cell group comes together under one Lord. The cell groups should be mutually interdependent and support the whole. He explains that the small group in Korean American churches is a basic unit that is more than just a Bible study group. Many Korean people not only study

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<sup>441</sup> Jung Young Lee, *Marginality*, 72-95.

<sup>442</sup> Jung Young Lee, *Marginality*, 115-145.



the Bible but also share their personal and social issues and problems in these groups. Through such a structure, Lee asserts that marginality will overcome marginality and liberate all people and provide peace.<sup>443</sup>

Lee continues to argue that all church members are equal as part of the family of God and share the same privileges and power. The church needs a complementary framework of a harmonious whole. The church should not see suffering as the consequence of sin, rather, all are called to join in the suffering of Jesus as marginal people. Just as Jesus is our true friend, suffering and giving his life for us, when church members support one another in their trials and struggles, true friendship is formed. When we share our suffering with others, the suffering is eased and produces true friendship, which supports endurance. According to Lee, "Overcoming suffering means coping with it, finding meaning and support through community fellowship, and believing divine presence is with us."<sup>444</sup> People tend to avoid loneliness, but it is overcome by confronting it. When we deny experiences of marginality, it denies the existential relationality of marginality. Lee illustrates that marginality is overcome through marginality because we are marginal to God. Transformation is possible as people acknowledge they are part of God's creative core. When all of us are marginal, love becomes the norm of our lives, and service becomes the highest aspiration of our creativity. We then become servants to one another in love.<sup>445</sup>

Challenges of Marginality. Korean Kirogi mothers have experienced multiple marginalities in both Korean society and organizations in the U.S. Kirogi mothers'

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<sup>443</sup> Jung Young Lee, *Marginality*, 115-145

<sup>444</sup> Jung Young Lee, *Marginality*, 155 - 161.

<sup>445</sup> Jung Young Lee, *Marginality*, 155 - 161.

loneliness, especially when they first engage in Kirogi living, is one of the signs of the sacrifices they make for the sake of their children's education. Some research partners reported that loneliness is the one of the biggest challenges for them in the U.S., since they spend most of their time all by themselves. There were no social support groups for most of the women in my study where they could find relief from their stress. One partner said that being in the U.S. is like living in a wilderness; she could not find anyone to have a heart-to-heart talk with until she met an empathic pastor's wife. Another research partner expressed that living in American culture itself is very stressful. Jaesang Lyu observes that even ordinary tasks could be stressful for Korean Kirogi mothers, such as a doctor's visit, a car repair, or disputing a bill.<sup>446</sup> Thus, Korean Kirogi mothers face a lot of external strains and feel socially disconnected. Their experiences of marginality are produced due to a lack of English proficiency, racial discrimination, and intergenerational and cultural conflicts. These experiences contribute to a loss of voice. Thus, Kirogi mothers experience a sudden change from competitive and busy lives to lonely lives. For some of them, their loneliness is attributed to not feeling welcomed by the majority of U.S. citizens, and they often feel marginalized. One research partner indicated that living in the U.S. is like being in a barren desert—her life has never been this hard. The most difficult thing has been just surviving from day to day. Culbertson observes, "Margins are the wilderness. The dark and scary places are like the wilderness."<sup>447</sup> For him, God is powerfully felt in the wilderness because God never ignores people's otherness.

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<sup>446</sup> Jaesang Lyu, "Marginality and Coping: A Communal Contextual Narrative Approach to Pastoral Care with Korean American Christians" (Ph. D. diss., University of Denver, 2009), 55-58.

<sup>447</sup> Culbertson, *Caring for God's People*, xii.

Another form of marginality Kirogi mothers experienced is connected with the social prejudices that most of them encountered in Korean communities, Korean immigrant churches, and American society. Feminist perspectives reveal the impact of patriarchy on various cultures, traditions, and ways of thinking that demonize and denigrate women. The research partners were criticized, both because they are not guided by a male head of household and because they are considered to have loose morals. Primarily because of the influence of the media, Korean immigrants tend to assume that Kirogi mothers are easily tempted to be unfaithful to their husbands. Korean Kirogi fathers are viewed as victims, while Korean mothers are accused of being selfish. These prejudices are based on traditional Confucian and Christian hierarchical views of men and women in marital relationships. Kirogi mothers are judged because they are living separate from their husbands, although both of them agreed to the arrangement. Several research partners claimed that the media contributed to Koreans' social biases toward Kirogi mothers. They stated that the media intentionally exaggerates a few cases in order to create a stigma around being a Kirogi mother. One asserted that the biases are based on a narrow-minded understanding about women living alone. However, she also recognized that she might have been like them if she were in their shoes.

In addition, unlike other Korean immigrant single mothers, such as divorced women, these research partners are sometimes the object of envy because Kirogi mothers are relatively well off financially, while there are many Korean immigrants who struggle financially. Thus, many research partners have become cautious and feel like they do not belong in their churches. Even so, church may be the only place for them to feel comforted and to have social networks.

While Korean immigrant churches may provide safety and comfort, some of them also present cultural limitations because they maintain traditional cultural values. Five research partners reported that couple-focused ministries in their churches made them feel marginalized. One research partner felt discriminated against because her church excluded Kirogi mothers from serving, while women with husbands were able to take on special roles in the church. Another research partner described her experience of becoming gradually silent in her church because of prejudices and discrimination. Couple-focused ministries in Korean immigrant churches make Kirogi mothers feel disadvantaged and marginalized. However, none of these women apparently raised their voices about their oppressive and marginalizing experiences. Instead, they chose to remain silent.

Opportunities in Marginality. Some Kirogi mothers feel privileged because not many Korean mothers actually move to another country, even though this is a dream for many of them. This sense of privilege and their hope for success sustain these mothers through their time of Kirogi living. It is like they are living goal-oriented lives, and while it is a short time or a predetermined length of time, it is a very meaningful experience for them. It is important to them that they are both fulfilling their traditional roles and feeling freedom.

As Doehring states, to be feminist means to be aware of marginality. Korean Kirogi mothers experience marginality as they seek to acculturate to life in a new culture as foreigners and women. This unique experience challenges them to renegotiate their identities from the margins of society. Although some of my research partners regretted their decision to engage in a Kirogi living arrangement, all of them found new meaning

through personal development and spiritual growth, self-fulfillment, and perspective changes during their time of Kirogi living. Since these women have more time than they had in Korea, when they were solely focused on their children's success and driven by societal pressures, they have been able to seek opportunities for their own enrichment, even if they are not totally removed from the sacrificial role of mother. They have been able to study, read books, learn how to play musical instruments, and gain other new skills during their Kirogi lives in the United States. Thus, separation from their husbands has been ultimately beneficial.

Some of my research partners developed autonomy through their Kirogi living experiences. They have discovered their own agency and have gained self-confidence. Some research partners are able to live without relying very much on their husbands, who took care of most financial and business matters in the past. One of them was able to get a license and to find work during her Kirogi living arrangement. Furthermore, she does not simply obey her husband when he dictates her actions, rather, she tells him that she will take care of things herself, and this is a result of her newly earned confidence. Similarly, another research partner did not follow her husband's order to return to Korea due to his inability to financially support his family in the U.S. Instead, she chose to stay in the U.S. and support herself. Likewise, for some of the women, Kirogi living is more stress-free when they are able to live by their own decisions as heads of household. Their development of autonomy is related to aggression, which also helps them to move out of their social isolation.

For Kathleen Greider, aggression as a drive to survive and thrive is fundamental to relationality. According to her, it is a "desire for self-expression, meaningful

connection with others, response to frustration, defense against threat, and intent to harm.”<sup>448</sup> However, it is usually denied and repressed in the unconscious, where it contributes to unjust actions.<sup>449</sup> Kirogi mothers have not been free to express their thoughts and feelings explicitly because to do so would go against the moral values of Korean Confucian society. Nonetheless, Insook Lee maintains that Korean women’s aggression is an inner resource, a resource that has been systematically suppressed by Confucian culture.<sup>450</sup> Lee notes that repression of aggression causes a variety of problems, because Korean women believe they can acquire self-fulfillment and happiness by limiting their personal and instinctual needs and desires.<sup>451</sup> Yet, when the Kirogi mothers in my study overcame their silence and expressed their positive aggression, they found new parts of themselves and became more confident, so they were able to live more autonomously in the U.S. I would suggest that these Korean women moved from submissive attitudes to embracing healthy aggression.

Several research partners’ perspectives broadened as a result of their Kirogi living experiences. They realized the importance of family, especially that the marital relationship is more important than the parent-child relationship. They newly acknowledged how precious their husbands are. This changed such traditional values as relying on their children when they get old. One research partner stated, “There is no guarantee that my kids will turn out well here in the future, and it is still all up to them in Korea as well.” These women are grieving losing prime time for their couple relationships. This shift in perspective is noteworthy because these women’s cultural

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<sup>448</sup> Greider, *Too Militant*, 123-125.

<sup>449</sup> Greider, *Too Militant*, 123-125.

<sup>450</sup> Insook Lee, “Confucianism and the Korean Family,” 160-161.

<sup>451</sup> Insook Lee, 163-164.

family value of being mother-child-centered has changed to being couple-centered. The Kirogi living arrangement has changed their Confucian values and their perspectives. They have developed new understandings that connect closely with their experiences in the U.S.

The most prominent meaning that my research partners found was in the enhancement of their spiritualities, regardless of their successes in achieving their goals. They searched for the working of God in their families and whenever they faced challenges such as family conflicts and financial difficulties. One research partner confessed that she is happy, even with the absence of her husband, because God knows her heart and her difficulties and touches her. In light of these Kirogi mothers' narratives, the more they had faced hard times, the more they have grown spiritually and in faith. Through their spiritual growth, they have come to know who God is and to find new identities in which they feel loved and accepted by God as they are. They have become convinced that God is guiding them and has a big picture plan for them. This reveals that, for Kirogi mothers, their relationship with God is the most encouraging factor helping them overcome their sufferings. Thus, they are empowered and encouraged to become confident and hopeful. Experiencing marginality in Jesus Christ helps people overcome sociocultural marginality and liberates them.

As several Kirogi mothers shared, some churches really appear to care about Kirogi mothers' adjustment, placing them in small groups and helping them to join in church activities. Unlike the Korean immigrant churches in my literature review, not all Korean communities or immigrant churches seem to stick to Korean traditional values. Some of the Kirogi mothers reported that they have not experienced prejudice from

Korean immigrants because there are a lot of Kirogi mothers in their churches and people understand the reasons for their Kirogi living arrangements. A few research partners reported that their church was very warm and welcoming, even though it is small.

For Korean Christian Kirogi mothers, the Korean immigrant church can be the most appropriate place for feeling a sense of belonging. Some research partners reported that they experienced comfort in the Korean immigrant church. One research partner was able to survive because she felt God's grace in the church, although church members demonstrated negative attitudes toward her. Similarly, others shared that in the church, they feel as if God's grace is warm and embracing. One research partner described her positive experience in a church in her early years as a Kirogi mother: "Having people to talk to made me happier than the service itself. I liked the family-like atmosphere. Everyone greeted us nicely and genuinely wanted to help us." Another research partner shared her positive experience with a church after switching churches, and she offered this advice for churches: "Rather than doing it out loud, the church should be open-minded and patient so we could come join it comfortably. And then encourage us once in a while. Agree with us . . . I think that's how to build trust."

Furthermore, not all Kirogi mothers are passive or silent; some are very active in their churches. Many research partners said they were silent until they felt safe, but once they felt safe they become active. This would appear to be the result of receiving support from caring churches. On the other hand, even if research partners want to be invisible, it does not mean that they want to be disconnected from God. All of the research partners in my study depended on God more than they did before entering into Kirogi living. Thus, during their period of silence, churches should be patient and not give Kirogi mothers



excessive attention, but they also should have small group members or leaders help them. Some research partners explained that they felt supported when their churches shared responsibility for settling new Kirogi mothers and assisted them in opening bank accounts, buying cars, and finding apartments. As Jung Young Lee says, the small group is a basic unit for providing mutual interdependence and contributing to the community of the whole church.

Finally, another important concept in understanding Korean Kirogi mothers' adjustment is their theological understanding of family separation. If they believe family separation is a sin, this is deeply related to traditional Korean cultural beliefs. However, most of the Kirogi mothers in this study responded that they do not believe their family separation is a sin. Two of the Kirogi mothers even reported that their family separation was the result of God's guidance. Some of the women shared that it does not look right biblically to be separated, but they believe it is all right under certain circumstances. One Kirogi mother specifically stated that her situation led her to the U.S. and it is not a sin. These women do not feel guilty, even if their pastors speak negatively about Kirogi living from time to time. However, these women still experience prejudices toward them and receive unwanted attention in the church. Therefore, their theological beliefs about family separation are optimistic signs that they are not influenced by patriarchal theology. This also implies that Korean Christian Kirogi mothers are challenged more by Korean traditional values and patriarchal structures in their daily lives than in their spiritual lives.

### Conclusions

Relational cultural theory and feminist practical theologies both emphasize the importance of relationship in women's everyday lives. Overall, my research partners'

adjustment processes in Kirogi living present their spiritual journeys. I am going to conclude my discussion of these women's Kirogi living experiences in light of Henry Nouwen's three movements of the spiritual life. For Nouwen,

Spiritual life is a reaching out to our innermost self, to our fellow human beings and to our God. In the midst of a turbulent, often chaotic, life we are called to reach out, with courageous honesty to our innermost self, with relentless care to our fellow human beings, and with increasing prayer to our God.<sup>452</sup>

Nouwen proposes that people can reach out to God by navigating through three movements: loneliness to solitude, hostility to hospitality, or illusion to prayer. The first movement, loneliness to solitude, is the beginning of a spiritual life in which there is no longer fear. Loneliness reminds people that they are not home. Solitude is a process of looking inward and finding companionship in oneself.<sup>453</sup> Having discovered the peace of solitude, people can experience the second movement from hostility to hospitality.<sup>454</sup> Once they have reached out to their innermost beings, they can then reach out to the strangers whom they meet. They can learn to treat strangers as guests who help them know God. Nouwen describes strangers as being estranged from their pasts and cultures, from their neighbors and families, from their deepest selves, and from their God. He asserts that Christians should offer an open and hospitable space for these strangers. The third movement is from illusion to prayer. Nouwen proposes that prayer is a means to participate in the intimate life of God. Illusions cause people to place themselves at the center of God. However, in the movement from illusion to prayer, people come to know that God is the director of their lives and they arise to more fulfilling lives in God.

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<sup>452</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 16.

<sup>453</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 34-35.

<sup>454</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 65.

Nouwen is not referring to prayer done in solitude, but in community with a church. He states that people reach the position of prayer through words, silence, and spiritual guidance.<sup>455</sup>

My research partners' narratives present these three movements of reaching out to their inner selves, to their neighbors, and to God. Most of them have experienced both suffering and empowerment, connection and disconnection, through their various relationships. Nouwen describes his three movements developmentally, but for my research partners, there is no progressive sequence to this spiritual process, or sometimes, there is no clear indication as to which stage occurred first. For example, some research partners first experienced God's love and then moved to reach out to themselves and to others. Others experienced the love of neighbors and then moved to reach out to God. These three movements are like a spiral process. In the following three sections, I will describe the research partners' lives in terms of connection to self, connection to others, and connection to God in dialogue with Nouwen's concepts of solitude, hospitality, and prayer.

### Connection to Self

As I have noted, Nouwen states that part of the spiritual life is a reaching out to our innermost selves. Most of my research partners experienced loneliness as strangers in a foreign country. They were at the margins of American society, Korean communities, and Korean immigrant churches. Facing difficulties in the process of acculturation and in taking on new roles as mothers led them to feel lonely and exhausted. Some of them observed that they are alone in the world and their new home is like a wilderness.

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<sup>455</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 114-135.

However, living in this desert enabled them to reach out to their innermost selves. They gradually moved from self-centeredness or self-sufficiency to recognizing their finiteness and their need for God. Then they begin to empty themselves and rely on God more. Accordingly, they moved away from their false selves and gained new self-identities and new perspectives. They learned that they are precious beings as God's children, and they discovered new identities in which they feel loved and accepted by God as they are. They also have become convinced that God is guiding them and has a big picture plan for them.

These personal and spiritual developments have helped my research partners transcend themselves and become self-confident in managing their lives and having relationships with others. But, before coming to these points in their lives, they have sacrificed their needs in order to perform their roles as mothers, wives, and daughters-in-law, both before and during the Kirogi living arrangement. From the perspective of RCT, they have experienced many disconnections in their relationships. Their self-sacrifices can be attributed to an unconscious search for meaning through their children's achievements, and therefore, they have not been based on genuine love. Culbertson would say their sacrifices have been acts of selfishness. Yet they have been insensitive to their own needs and desires. They have not realized that their sacrificial love has contributed to their sense of inadequacy and deterred the formation of mutual relationships with others. When they have given and given and become worn down, they have experienced disconnections with their children. Self-sacrifice prevents the expression of persons' authentic selves.

Nonetheless, during this spiritual journey and free from their culturally imposed roles, some research partners came to know who they are and found freedom and enjoyed

their lives. Some partners found that their pursuits were not what their genuine selves wanted. Thus, these women became free from their false selves, and Kirogi living became an opportunity for them to find their autonomy and self-identities. Gaining self-confidence, they were able to make their own decisions and become more assertive and aggressive in relationships with family members and others. As Jung Young Lee would say, they entered into the real center from the margins. They gradually came to seek their own voices. Several research partners also experienced perspective changes as a result of their Kirogi living experiences.

In sum, these research partners do not blame God for placing them in a lonely and difficult place, rather, they thank God for sending them to a blessed place where they have been able to navigate away from self-centeredness and find new hope. They have gradually moved from self-centeredness or self-sufficiency to a sense of their finiteness. They have learned to empty themselves and turn their eyes toward God and rely more on God. Their false selves are being stuffed away, and they are gaining new self-identities and new perspectives in God. Thus, they can thank God because the loneliness or marginality they have experienced has enabled them to acknowledge the truth about their existence and helped them to reach out to God.

#### Connection to Others

Many research partners felt that people, including Korean immigrant people, were hostile toward them. This made them feel marginalized. Their experiences of hostility involved social prejudices, envy, slandering, traditional cultural values, and dealing with a new culture. However, as time went on, they moved to hospitality by having fellowship with people and participating in church activities and service. This movement is the same

as the women's experiences of feeling disconnection and then finding connection. Most of the research partners at least once faced social disconnection. Their experiences of marginality have resulted from a lack of English proficiency, racial discrimination, and intergenerational and cultural conflicts. These experiences likely contributed to a loss of voice. As presented in the previous subsection, the women's social disconnection was described as being like living in a barren desert. Kirogi mothers have felt excluded and like they did not belong in their communities and churches as a result of social biases and couple-focus ministries. Thus, many have become cautious.

However, most of my research partners joined small Bible study groups and experienced hospitality from the group members. These small groups provided social interactions for the Kirogi mothers in which they experienced receiving hospitality and giving hospitality to others. Thus, one of the best things Korean immigrant churches can do for Kirogi women is offer them small groups that provide an open and hospitable space for sharing with others.

For one research partner, transformation came when she experienced hospitality from just one person. Because of that relationship, she was empowered and soon experienced connection in relationships with others, with God, and with herself as well. For this woman, the beginning of the spiritual life was connection to another person. Then she connected with God, others, and herself. This one connection broke her strategies for disconnection and transformed her life. Finally, she became hospitable to others. Thus, the hospitality of a single person can make a big difference in a Kirogi mother's life.

#### Connection to God

Even if the Kirogi mothers in my study primarily experienced disconnections in their familial and other relationships, the experience of a new connection to God enabled them to overcome their experiences of multiple disconnections and often helped them to connect with others better. This reveals that, for Kirogi mothers, their relationship with God is the most encouraging factor in helping them overcome their challenges and crises. The more they were involved in a church, the more they grew spiritually in faith. Their experiences of hostility were mitigated or transformed through involvement with a church community. All of the research partners in this study confessed to a deepening of their faith through their Kirogi living experiences. They have constantly developed new meanings in relation to God and have become convinced that God is guiding them and has a plan for them. Their trust in God gives them peace and drives out their worries and anxieties. Thus, they are empowered and encouraged to become confident and hopeful.

For most of the research partners in this study, fellowship, words, and participating in church activities led them to prayer or intimacy with God. As with the experience of hospitality, the small Bible study groups helped them get to know who God is and guided them to reach out in prayer, which is done with other Christians.

#### A Practical Theological Framework for Pastoral Care for Korean Kirogi Mothers

In order to develop a practical theological framework for pastoral care for Korean Kirogi mothers, their adjustment issues in relation to family, society, and religious communities have been discussed. Some feminist pastoral care models have been used as interpretive sources to analyze the findings of my research and to contribute to a pastoral theological model and strategies for nurturing Korean Christian Kirogi mothers. Through my research partners' stories, it is evident that most of them have experienced both

suffering and empowerment through their various relationships. As one research partner observed, “Relationship is the key.” Neuger states that relationality is a core concept in feminist theory because relationality is a unique dimension of women’s lives.<sup>456</sup> Thus, I would suggest that immigrant churches help Kirogi mothers enhance their spiritualities through providing them with opportunities to engage others in mutually empathic and empowering relationships.

To build a pastoral care and counseling framework for helping Korean Kirogi mothers adjust to their Kirogi lives, I have drawn insights from feminist understandings of relationality in connection to individual and communal care. My framework has arisen from an analysis of my research findings using RCT and a feminist understanding of the living human web as well as theologies of self-sacrifice and marginality. Attuned with these emphases, I am calling my pastoral care paradigm a *hospitality pastoral care model* for the spiritual care of Korean Christian Kirogi mothers.

In using the term *hospitality*, I am drawing on Nouwen’s description of hospitality:

Hospitality means primarily the creation of free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines.<sup>457</sup>

For Nouwen, to offer hospitality to strangers, a group should create an open and free space where divisions do not exist. This space is congruent with the idea of God’s incarnating God’s self as a divine marginality. God emptied the divine nature into human form and as Jesus experienced lifelong marginality in order to offer hospitality to us.

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<sup>456</sup> Neuger, *Women and Relationality*, 116-118.

<sup>457</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 71.



Thus, Jesus became the marginalized by giving everything to us. The place of the margin that Jesus provided is open and free space for strangers and marginalized people. In the beginning of Kirogi living, the Kirogi mothers in my study experienced crises as strangers, facing loneliness and hostility. However, as God's marginality became the central place in their lives, these Kirogi mothers actually felt privileged to find themselves in the place where Jesus is. In this hospitable space, Kirogi mothers could no longer offer false-sacrifices, rather, they had to engage in true sacrifices that offered mutual self-giving and brought them to wholeness. The space of hospitality is not a space in which to ignore their needs or desires, but a space in which to discover who they really are in God. Thus, the idea of Jesus' incarnation provides a theological foundation for an individual and communal pastoral care model that emerges from the interplay between Korean Kirogi mothers' experiences of oppression and liberation and the multiple resources of traditional cultures and acculturation.

As Kirogi mothers become humble and empty themselves in a foreign country, their experiences of loneliness and suffering enable them to gain new identities and self-confidence. As mentioned, Kirogi mothers are likely to belong to the community of God's marginal people and are conscious of Christ's presence as these people offer the genuine love of God to them. In this community, people grow psychologically and spiritually and move from loneliness to solitude, from hostility to hospitality, and from illusions to the Divine. Kirogi mothers can ultimately overcome marginality through liberation and empowerment and move from disconnection to connection. In this pastoral care paradigm, not only the individual but also community is respected.

As Jung Young Lee asserts, the church needs to treat all church members as having equal status in the family of God, with the same privileges and power. Individual power also needs the complementary framework of a harmonious whole. This harmonious whole is consistent with the Korean Confucian collective mindset in which every individual is respected equally. Likewise, for Nouwen, the core of a Christian spirituality is to reach out to strangers, especially marginalized people, and invite them into our lives.<sup>458</sup> Hospitality heals individual relationships and formulates a new community for the suffering. *Hospitality* is a biblical term that offers deepened and broadened insights regarding our relationships with our fellow human beings. In the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, hospitality is presented as our duty to welcome the stranger in our home. We are told that strangers carry precious gifts with them.<sup>459</sup>

For this model, I suggest three functional images of care: welcoming, accompanying, and empowering. The first image of care in this paradigm is welcoming. As soon as Kirogi mothers arrive in a foreign country, they become strangers who feel fearful and marginalized. They need safe and free spaces in which they will feel accepted and welcomed. Welcoming includes waiting until they open their hearts to others, so hosts need to be patient, even as they offer sincere and supportive attention. It may take a long time for Kirogi mothers to feel safe and welcomed. They need to experience kind attitudes and a family-like atmosphere. The second image is accompanying. This means inviting Kirogi mothers to share their lives, including their loneliness and their difficulties. The best place for them to be accompanied is in small groups or prayer meetings sponsored by their churches. To accompany them, mutually enhancing

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<sup>458</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 66-69.

<sup>459</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 66-69.

relationships are required, and small groups can easily provide these. In such groups, Kirogi mothers can reflect on the stories in the Bible and share their own experiences. Accompanying helps them become aware of and confess both their limitations and their potentials and external realities. Thirdly, the image of empowering means helping Kirogi mothers move toward and overcome their oppressions and limitations. Through this process, they can learn to raise their voices and become active in transforming relationships with themselves, family members, other members in their organizations, and God.

### Strategies for Pastoral Care and Counseling

The strategies for pastoral care and counseling enumerated in this section are based on the multiple meanings of the research partners' experiences as analyzed from the perspectives of relational cultural theory and feminist practical theologies. These strategies are designed to welcome, accompany, and empower Korean Kirogi mothers in their connections with family members, others, society, and churches.

First of all, Kirogi mothers need to become aware of the hidden values they hold that are rooted in Confucian and Christian teachings and to change how they see themselves and their experiences. This includes understanding how the system of patriarchy operates in hidden ways in their lives, such as in their self-sacrifice for their families and country at the expense of their own needs and self-fulfillment. Religious professionals can help Kirogi mothers uncover their hidden assumptions and values and teach them how these are based in patriarchal structures and understandings.

Second, pastors and pastoral counselors need to be sensitive to the social prejudices that exist toward Kirogi mothers and recognize how social biases cause them

suffering. Pastors ought to express care for Kirogi families through their sermons and public prayers. Churches and pastoral counselors should not judge a Kirogi family's separation as sinful or assert that Kirogi families should be reunited so spouses can live together. In addition, pastors need to be aware of and cautious about the implicit discrimination that may exist in their churches toward singles and Kirogi mothers and try not to favor married couples living together when selecting persons for ministerial responsibilities.

Third, pastors and pastoral counselors should understand the various contexts of Kirogi mothers' adjustment. They need to understand the heavy burdens they bear in taking care of their families and the difficulties they face in adjusting to U.S. culture. Out of sensitivity to Kirogi mothers' fears of not being accepted, pastors and church members should refrain from giving them too much individual attention when they first move to the U.S., especially if they seem to need some space and time to adjust. Instead, church members should be patient until these newcomers feel safe and begin to open up to those at church. However, it is beneficial if pastors empower Korean Kirogi mothers by providing places where they can become connected with others. For example, they can help them by suggesting they join a small Bible study group or attend particular church activities. They can also provide information about activities outside the church that they might be interested in or that might be helpful to them.

Fourth, pastors need to train small group leaders in how to help Kirogi mothers and nurture their spirituality. In small Bible study groups, Kirogi mothers can express their thoughts and feelings and listen to what others have to say. Small group leaders need to remember that they have to keep the confidentiality of their members, especially

because Kirogi mothers are sensitive to social prejudices toward them. Small group leaders also need to recognize that small Bible study groups can be key places of social interaction for Kirogi mothers, where they experience fellowship and gather information that is helpful to them in their lives.

Fifth, pastors need provide Kirogi mothers with practical assistance to help them through the stresses of adjusting to their new lives. Providing practical help, including childcare, during their first few months of residence will facilitate Kirogi mothers' adjustment and the opening up of their hearts to connect with other people emotionally. On the opposite end of the spectrum, the sixth strategy for pastoral care of Kirogi families is for pastors to provide them with support and assistance to help them readjust to living together when the mothers and children return to Korea.

Seventh, pastoral counselors should understand that Kirogi mothers have multiple roles and experience multiple oppressions, so they should help them raise their voices to protest unjust situations. Eighth, pastors and pastoral counselors need to be sensitive to the issues and tensions that arise due to cultural gaps between parents and children and between spouses. They can help families by educating Kirogi mothers in how to communicate with their children and spouses. The "both-and" model proposed by Samuel Lee can strengthen bicultural families through encouraging them to use both of their cultures as complementary sources for new ways of being.

Ninth, pastoral counselors can provide individual counseling to assist Kirogi mothers. Actively listening to their experiences and acknowledging their suffering are more helpful than one might think. Narrative therapy would be the best therapeutic fit for Kirogi mothers in individual counseling, since they have many hidden core narratives

that contain many assumptions. During their interviews, several Korean Kirogi mothers told me that the interview was a good opportunity for them to look back and examine their journeys to find meanings in them. Neuger asserts that new narratives allow for new interpretations and meaning-making.<sup>460</sup> These Korean Kirogi mothers were able to explore or become aware of the multiple meanings or hidden values of their experiences and to come to understand their thoughts and feelings. Even having one interview session was helpful for them to be able to make some sense of their confusion and find meaning in their life. Using both narrative theory and feminist principles, healing processes should emphasize women's strengths and resources rather than their deficits and pathologies. Not only individual counseling but group counseling and family counseling can be beneficial to Kirogi mothers.

#### Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations to the current study. First, this study is based on interviews with only fourteen Kirogi mothers, who were all Christian. Thus, these fourteen women's experiences may not be representative of the larger population of Korean Kirogi mothers, especially those who are not Christian.

Secondly, although I made efforts to create a safe environment for research partners to open their minds freely, some may have been cautious about disclosing certain personal experiences to me for this study. In particular, they might have not shared some experiences that they thought were shameful. However, most of them appeared to share their life stories willingly when I invited them to open their hearts during the interview

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<sup>460</sup> Christie Cozad Neuger, *Counseling Women: A Narrative, Pastoral Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 85-88.

process. I found some of them appeared to feel understood, and they expressed their appreciation for the process.

Thirdly, in this study, only Kirogi wives were interviewed, since their husbands were living in Korea. Although the purpose of this study was to understand Kirogi mothers' adjustment, focusing only on their perspectives limited what could be understood about their husbands' experiences. In the future, a study of Korean Kirogi fathers' adjustment in addition to the mothers' experiences would provide rich insights into the marriage relationships of Kirogi couples and resources for fuller care for both of them.

Fourthly, although I tried to interpret the experiences of these research partners objectively, as a Kirogi mother myself, it would have been impossible for me to totally block the inclusion of my subjective interpretations of the experiences of other Korean Kirogi mothers. Often in the process of interpretation and analysis, I had to rely on my own subjectivity. Sometimes, I found that I was able to understand my research partners' minds easily since I have had similar experiences. Thus, I believe that my experience as a Kirogi mother enriched my understanding of research partners' experiences and benefitted this study. Nonetheless, my subjectivity and close involvement with the topic of this study may have led to gaps in my interpretations and conclusions.

Finally, because the results of this study produced a lot of themes to deal with, I was not able to conduct deep analyses of or fully interpret each theme. Therefore, for future studies, I suggest narrowing the scope, such as focusing on Kirogi mothers' parenting or Kirogi mothers' spirituality. If a future study were to be done on the same subject as this one, I would recommend using another qualitative methodology, such as

case study, to delve into the subject more deeply.



## Appendix A

### List of Categories and Properties

Category	Property	Sub-Property
Reasons for the Decision to Leave Korea	Pursuing a Better Educational Environment	Children's Success and Future Well-Being
		Dissatisfaction with the Korean Educational System
		Societal Pressure
		Hard to Separate from Children
	Escaping	From Strained Relationships with Husbands
		From Feeling Helpless As a Mother
		From Expensive Private Education Costs
Family Dynamics	Tense Relationships	Conflicts with Children
		Marital Conflicts
	Positive Relationships	Improved Marital Relationships
		Trusting Marital Relationships
		Close Relationships with Children
	Lack of Intimacy	Lack of Intimacy with Spouse
		Lack of Intimacy with Children
Kirogi Mothering	Educational Manager	
	New Gender Role: Head of Family	
	Diminishing Mother Roles	Lack of Ability to Support Their Children's Academic Work
		Parentification of Children
	Mediator	
Facing Challenges	Unstable Legal Status	
	Experiencing of Prejudice	
	Lack of Self-Fulfillment	
	Loneliness	
	Financial Difficulties	
	Adjusting to a New Culture	
Factors Supporting the Maintenance of Kirogi Life	Children's Satisfaction	
	Modern Technology	

	Husband's Frequent Visits and Stability	
	Korean Community	
	Feeling Freedom	
	Independent and Positive Characters	
	Support from Acquaintances	
	Limited Length of Stay	
Constructing Meaning	Spiritual Growth of the Family	Kirogi Mother's Growth in Faith
		Husband's Growth in Faith
		Children's Growth in Faith
	Self-Fulfillment	
	Perspective Changes	New Awarenesses
		Realizing the Importance of Family
Roles of the Korean Immigrant Church	Causing Feelings of Marginality	Vulnerability
		Object of Envy
		Object of Prejudices
		Couple-Focused Ministries
	Providing Religious Activities and Purpose	
	Ministering to Psychological Needs	Comfort
		Direction
		A Sense of Security
	Supplying Social Opportunities	
	Assisting with Practical Needs	
Mothers' Theological Views of Family Separation	Not a Sin	
	The Family Should Be Together	
	God's Guidance	

## Appendix B

### INFORMED CONSENT

My name is Inhyo Cho, and I am a Ph.D. student at Claremont School of Theology. I am conducting a phenomenological study as part of my dissertation. The purpose of this research is to study the meaning of Christian Kirogi mothers' experiences in adjusting in Korean community and Korean immigrant church settings. I hope adequate pastoral care and counseling for Kirogi mothers can be developed.

If you consent, you will be asked to participate in one session of about two hours of oral interview. If necessary, you may be asked for a follow up interview. I will make a digital audio recording of the interview which will be destroyed following the completion of the dissertation. Your name will be kept confidential in all of the reporting and/or writing related to this study. I will be the only person present for the interview and the only person who listens to the tales with the possible exception of my professor. I may alter some identifying details in order to further protect your anonymity. When I write my report of the research findings, I will use pseudonyms – made up names – for all participants, unless you specify in writing at the bottom of this form that you wish to be identified by name. There is the possibility that I will publish this study or refer to it in published writing in the future. In this event, I will continue to use pseudonyms, as described above, and I may alter some identifying details in order to further protect your anonymity.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may still refuse to answer any question that you do not wish to answer. You may also withdraw from the study at any time. The only known risk of doing the interview is that painful memories may be shared. It is possible that you might feel distress in the course of the conversation. If this happens, please inform me promptly.

While there is no guaranteed benefit, it is possible that you will enjoy sharing your answers to these questions or that you will find the conversation meaningful. This study is intended to benefit the Korean immigrant churches for Kirogi mothers at the present and in the future, and by enlivening our discourse on theology and practice of pastoral care and counseling with Kirogi mothers and families.

My professor is Dr. Kyungsik Samuel Lee for Pastoral Care and Counseling at Claremont School of Theology. You can reach him at the school by calling 1(USA)-626-616-2478. You can reach me at 1-714-864-9884 (USA). You may contact either of us at any time if you have questions about this study.

By signing below, you are agreeing to a recorded interview for this research study. Be sure that any questions you may have are answered to your satisfaction. If you agree to participate in this study, a copy of this document will be given to you.

Participant's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name:

## 인터뷰 동의서

안녕하세요. 저는 미국 캘리포니아에 있는 클래어몬트 신학대학원에서 박사 과정 중에 있는 조인호 입니다. 저는 박사논문을 준비하면서 미국 내의 기러기 엄마의 삶에 대하여 이야기를 나누며 이민 사회와 이민 교회에서 정착하는 과정에서 생기는 여러 문제를 연구 조사함으로써 어떻게 기러기 엄마들을 효과적으로 도울 수 있을 지 방법을 모색해 보고 그들을 위한 목회상담의 방향을 세워보고자 합니다. 이 연구 조사를 위하여 인터뷰에 참여할 수 있는 분들의 도움이 필요합니다.

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이 연구 조사와 관련하여 교수님과 통화하시길 원하시면 1-626-616-2478(미국 번호)로  
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## Appendix C

### KOREAN KIROGI MOTHERS QUESTIONNAIRE

#### Demographic Questions

Name (or Nickname) \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Number \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Status \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been staying in the US as a goose mother? \_\_\_\_\_ year(s) \_\_\_\_\_ months

Marriage Duration \_\_\_\_\_

Husband's Age \_\_\_\_\_ Husband's occupation \_\_\_\_\_

Children's Age \_\_\_\_\_ (F, M) \_\_\_\_\_ (F, M), \_\_\_\_\_ (F, M)

Where have you lived in Korea? \_\_\_\_\_

When are you planning to go back to Korea? \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been a Christian? \_\_\_\_\_

Denomination \_\_\_\_\_ Congregation size \_\_\_\_\_

Church Office \_\_\_\_\_ Church involvement \_\_\_\_\_

How many Kirogi mothers are in your church? \_\_\_\_\_

#### Interview Questions

##### I. Life Experiences in Korea

1. What was your reason or motivation for coming to the U.S. as a Kirogi mother?
2. What was your husband's response to your family becoming a Kirogi family?
3. What were your children's responses for this decision?
4. What were some major difficulties regarding the decision whether to live apart or not?
5. What were the responses from your family-in-law, family, and others around you?
6. How was your children's performance in school back in Korea?
7. How was your marital relationship in Korea?
8. How was the relationship between you and your husband and your children?

9. How was your relationship with your relatives back in Korea?
10. How was your personal relationship with God and involvement in the church back in Korea?
11. How did your faith or Biblical teachings affect your decision to become a Kirogi family?

(Your biblical concept of marriage and family)

## II. Life and Experiences in the U.S.

12. What was the purpose of choosing to come specifically to Los Angeles area?
13. Do you have your friends, family, or relatives living in the Los Angeles area?  
  
Since you arrived in the U.S., how was adjustment process to the new culture? What were some of the hardships?
14. What has helped you adapt to your new life in America? (e.g. persons, organization, community)
15. Are you content with your children's education in America and with American Education System?"
16. How has your relationship with your children and husband changed—if at all?  
  
What do you do in an effort to maintain a close bond within your family?  
  
Is there anything you are doing for your physical, mental, and spiritual health and growth?
17. What are the major reasons for attending this particular immigrant church?
18. If currently attending a church, how actively are you involved in the church? (If not, what not?)
19. How is your current faith in God? How has it changed from when you were in Korea?



20. What do you think the immigrant church's perception of Kirogi mothers is?

21. If any, what are the things that Immigrant church could do to help Kirogi mothers? Or what do you wish that immigrant church would do?

## Appendix D

### RESEARCH PLANS

- 1) Project Title: Interdisciplinary Study on Korean Kirogi Mothers' Adjustment: A Practical Theological Framework for Pastoral Care and Counseling
- 2) The name of researcher conducting the research:
  - a. Principal Investigator: Inhyo Cho
  - b. Department: Practical Theology with an emphasis in Spiritual Care and Counseling
- 3) Project Period: May 1, 2012 - April 30, 2013
- 4) Identify Proposed funding sources, if any, amount to be requested, and due date for application: None
- 5) The Objectives of the research, including what you expected to learn to demonstrate:

The purpose of this research is to study the Korean Kirogi phenomenon, especially of Christian Kirogi mothers' adjustment issues. Although an increasing number of Kirogi mothers migrate to English-speaking countries from Korea, not many persons in the U.S. know the meaning of this migrant family phenomenon. Therefore, I hope people in the U.S. will gain insight into the meaning of the Kirogi phenomenon and how to deal with it, especially in church settings.
- 6) A brief summary of any relevant recent literature addressing risks of the method, topic, or population involved in the research plan: None.
- 7) Data Collection:

In order to recruit potential participants, I am going to use the snowball sampling method. As soon as my proposal gets approved, I am going to recruit participants from a circle of people with whom I am acquainted and through word of mouth by persons known to both me and the participants. The participants will be Korean Kirogi mothers who came to the U.S. from Korea before 2007 and currently attend a Protestant Korean immigrant church in the Los Angeles metropolitan area. I will continue interview until I reach a saturation point at which I begin to hear the same information from participants. All participation is completely voluntary and they may withdraw at any time without penalty.

I will pay \$10.00 gift card per person for participating in the interview.
- 8) A brief summary of the procedure:

The in-depth, one-on-one interviews will be conducted in the Korean language. The interview will take approximately 60-120 minutes and all interviews will be digitally-recorded with the permission of interview participants, and then later

transcribed. If necessary, a follow-up interview will be scheduled. The participants will be informed before the interview about confidentiality, consent form, and the nature of the study.

- 9) Describe how the procedures reflect respect for the privacy:  
In order to protect participants, their real names and any demographic information will not be presented in this research.
- 10) Potential risks:  
There are no known risks associated with this interview. The only known risk of doing the interview is that painful memories may be shared.
- 11) Describe the procedures to assure confidentiality in the data:  
The interview is transcribed and all data will be saved to a file in my personal computer. I will securely lock this file and also keep all audio tapes in a cabinet which will be also locked. After finishing my research, all transcriptions will be destroyed and audio tapes will be erased.
- 12) Benefit of this research:  
This dissertation is a work of practical theology that investigates the theological meanings of Kirogi mothers' experiences and gains insights to construct an adequate model of pastoral care and counseling in the church to respond to Kirogi mothers' adjustment needs. As a result, the capacity of pastors, congregations, and pastoral counselors can be strengthened in providing effective ministry for Christian Kirogi mothers' adjustment through investigating the prejudices in relation to Korean cultural, religious, and social values that would affect Korean immigrant churches' attitudes and Kirogi mothers' decision-making.
- 13) I completed computer-based training on the Protection of Human Participants in Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative(CITI).

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